ONCE THERE WAS A MAN

NAPOLEON

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BY

JOSEPH DELTEIL

TRANSLATED
FROM
THE FRENCH
BY

LEWIS GALANTIÈRE

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TO

CARLYLE

"Life is a pale dream which vanishes."
—NAPOLEON.

"Fools believe in History."
—CHATEAUBRIAND.

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CHAPTER I

WOLF-TOOTH

"What runs in my veins is not water, but blood."

—NAPOLEON.

I

Wolf-Tooth

WHAT a little fellow! A scrawny Mediterranean lad with yellow cheeks and lank hair. Later on, this green will be bronze; but this morning it is olive. His eyes are small and black, like the eyes of the redbreasts of the Lebanon, the eyes of Algerian pirates. He looks very like those boys who run free in the orange groves of Andalusia. Where is he from? Marseilles? Venice? Tripoli? What blood of Asia runs in his dark veins? Is he a child of Pharaoh or a son of Mahomet? How poor he is! He who is one day to be the sun wears now a bedraggled coat whose skirts reach to his heels. A shabby round hat rests on the back of his head. His teeth are a yard long. His boots are the length of a league. His name is Napoleon.

On the fifth of May, 1821, on the isle of St. Helena, Dr.

Antommarchi took his measurements. Here they are:

"Height: five feet two and one-quarter inches. Cranial circumference: twenty and five-eighths inches. Neck short; hands and feet small. Breast white."

One day, while he was bathing, he said: "Look here, doctor. Beautiful arms; round breasts; smooth white skin; not a hair, except. . . . More than one woman would be proud of these breasts."

During the retreat from Russia he was described thus by Admiral Chichagoff: "He is short, stout, and pale. His neck is short and powerful, his head large, and his hair black."

* * *

Here he is in Paris without a thing to do. All day long he trails his great sabre and his imagination idly through the streets. "A young man," said Pontécoulant, "with a wan face, a livid complexion, round shoulders, and a frail and sickly appearance." Stendhal wrote of him: "The grey skirted coat he wore was so threadbare, he looked so shabby, I could scarcely believe at first that this man was a general." What a pleasure it is to depict him

thus in his orgy of poverty, to show the man in his simplest state, lean as a sword, with scaly ears, with dandruff on his collar, with his Mongolian cheekbones and his long barbarian hair. What a hideous man! His name is Bonaparte.

* * *

Now it is the year 1794 and he is twenty-five years old. What is he up to in Paris? What is he after? He remembers one day that far away in the hills of Corsica he had chased a rainbow.

Is there anything more enchanting than a rainbow when, at the close of a long rainy day, it blossoms suddenly between two valleys? A rainbow has all the grace of children and of angels, all the mystery of fables and of miracles. It holds in its fingers all of Asia, all of the Orient. It is the airiest thing in the world; its curve is like the line of God's cheek, and it is as fragile as a soap bubble. It is all lightness as it rests on the tips of the grain or the heather, as imponderable as butterfly-dust. Yet it has the strength of a Roman bridge, too. We see in it the geometry of iridescence, the crescent of cannon fire. Call

it *animus-anima.* It swims into view when we no longer look for it to appear, and it is so welcome that it turns our eye inside out, the way you turn a glove. You forget you have a body at the sight of it, and if you are still at the age of pink heels, wings blossom instantly at the back of your feet. This ring of rays seals the betrothal of Matter and Ether. It is the sky giving the breast to the earth. A rainbow plays at any game and allows itself any coquetry. It opens its hands—it has seven hands: violet, indigo, blue, green, yellow, orange, and red—and pours down upon you flowers, gems, and dreams. To virgins it shows lilies, and it crowns old men with purple. It is composed of all things, including the nuance of love and the colour of gold; for what is a rainbow if it is not dream made flesh, or rather dream made air?

One day, as I was saying, in the fields around Ajaccio, a rainbow was born. Little Napoleon, who had been overtaken by the storm, had sought shelter in a shepherd's hut. He stuck his nose out of the door, and marvel of marvels! all egg-yellow and fairy-blue, there was the rainbow straight ahead of him, strutting like a

peacock. Napoleon's first impulse was always to grab. "I want it!" he shouted, and he danced with desire. How was he to get it? The instinct of manoeuvre was already awake in the child; he would surprise it by a flank attack through the clump of evergreens. Tumbling down the side of the hill and following the bed of the stream, he effected a counter-march through the osiers, and there . . . damn me if during the manoeuvre the rainbow had not slipped dancing away through the vines! Off on its fourteen feet it leapt like a goat from crest to crest and slid from hill to hill, teasing and taunting its pursuer. Here it was, cooling its heels at the bottom of a gully, and there you saw it bounding on a stony peak. Suddenly it glowed with a new brilliance, dripped with colour; and in a moment it faded and vanished and seemed to give way like a girl ill with love. It was a woman all over.

"I'll get it," the child swore, and he flung himself after it. Ah, what a chase that was, across fields and through pastures, among the vines and around the olive groves! Washed by the storm, the countryside

shone like enamel. The clouds glowed with colour like a troop of Zouaves. On the heels of the rainbow the child galloped. Here was a rain-filled tree that sent its drops over his cheeks and down the length of his nerves. There in that spongy ditch he stumbled, fell, and rolled, and stood up all striped with red and blue mud. His shoes were caked with purplish slime. His hands were gloved with coloured earth. He crouched low as he ran and his little chest breathed in the immaculate air while his teeth bit hard over a will as flinty as a diamond.

And still the rainbow evaded him and flew. There was not a trick it did not know. It climbed to the tips of the eucalyptus trees; it crept along the rabbit runs. A hundred times the child thought he had it, and a hundred times it fled like a dream. Were those seven league boots it wore? But the child had a seven league heart. On, my lad! And on he went, bounding down the slopes of the meadows and leaping the blackthorn hedges. What luck! An ass cropping the grass under an olive tree. Hi! clk! and a green branch is whipped

again and again over the ass' back. The ass bawled and brayed with his tail in the air and his four hoofs raised at once to the four cardinal points. He breathed fire through his nostrils and sweated like a stevedore and pooped aloud to the heavens. But the more he swore, the more the boy rained blows upon his hide, and they moved forward, slopping through the puddles of rain and spattering mud on the blackbirds. Hi! Go on! Perched crosswise on his skinny beast, his legs sticking out and his fists in the air, what sort of monster was this that trotted along, half ass and half eagle?

Bit by bit the beast warmed to his work. They were gaining on their prey. Galloping from vale to vale, they ran down their rainbow in the Corsican bush. There it was, entangled in a clump of cactus at the end of nowhere. No way out. Napoleon sprang down and chased it on foot through the thorny cactus. But the rainbow must have been possessed by the devil. It moved from cactus to cactus while the child pursued it step by step, with bleeding legs and a face starred with blood. Here was a chalky cliff. Up he went with

his knees, his beak, and his nails. There was the rainbow at the top of the cliff. For a single instant it floated there, flowering on the very tip, motionless between earth and sky. The child came nearer . . . he was near it . . . he was there. He opened wide his arms. . . . By what miracle, by what prodigious swindle, was this arse of a rainbow able in the wink of an eye to leap into the void! There it went, far down across the plain, smiling more brightly and coloured more brilliantly than ever, but limping, limping a little, it seemed, like a volley of Parthian arrows. And the boy, weeping and drooling with rage on the edge of the steep cliff, picked up a handful of stones and threw them at the rainbow.

* * *

"And that's the kind of people we are, we Corsicans," he was later to say. For he was a Corsican to his very inwards. There is such a thing as the Corsican spirit; it is all longing, covetousness, conquest. From their poverty-stricken island these lively children gaze at the continent as into some great shop window filled

to bursting with food, jewels, rainbows. These wild people have but one dream: to step into Europe and carve out for themselves with beak and nails a place as constable, a place as Prefect of Police, a place as Emperor. To command in Europe—that is their dream. They are a long-toothed race, a race of *condottieri.* Every Corsican has brigandage in his blood. This is the a-b-c of the Corsican mind. That life is a table spread for its guests, where you take a stool, sit down, and gorge yourself with gold, fame, gaiety, pride, even suffering, to your heart's content; that man does nothing here below except to satisfy his notion of joy, the appetite for God being an infinitely more terrible concupiscence than the appetite for slime, and martyrdom a kind of voluptuousness, and the saints but the Don Juans of heaven; in a word, that Empire is the first right of man.

He is a Corsican, and he is a Mediterranean. Races spring up about a centre. A river or a mountain is not a frontier but a kernel. There is the Alpine nation, and the Rhenish nation; and there is the nation of the

Mediterranean, "a shining scarf that binds the dark-haired peoples." Napoleon is the supreme son of the the dark-haired peoples. His roots are drowned deep in the lymph of the Mediterranean, in the ancient lake that gave birth to the heroes and the Gods and from which sprang one after the other with sceptre and veil, Rome, Carthage, and Constantinople. He is bound by a thousand purple veins, by a thousand coral fibres, to the common mystical homeland. He has one foot in a Tyrian trireme and another in the barley-fields of Canaan. He descends on the distaff-side from the Pharaohs and on the spear-side from Alexander. His terrestrial circumnavigation is of the family of the old Mediterranean legends, the Trojan War, the crusade of the Golden Fleece.

Napoleon. . . . Once upon a time there was a little Corsican whose soul was hungry. He was a babe at his mother's breast, gazing with great eyes at the lamp, with a fixity, an insistence, which signified and attested that for him light was the greatest joy of his being, the first "thought" of his existence. Just so did this Corsi-

can Little Tom Thumb stare fixedly day after day across the sea at that bazaar which we call the world.

Thus did he spend his childhood with his nose against the window-pane.

* * *

One day the fairies came by. They let drop idly before the child a scholarship in the military school at Brienne. A capital even in his life. Up in the stirrup!

Brienne! "My head was in a whirl," he confessed. Imagine him in his little cubicle at Brienne, a candle burning in the neck of a bottle. His notes say: "Napoleon Bonaparte, born in Corsica. Reserved and studious, preferring study to every sort of amusement. Well grounded in mathematics, history, and geography. Very poor at games. Silent and fond of being alone. Changeable, high-handed, extremely given to selfishness. Always energetically. Great deal of pride. Ambitious and aspiring. . . ." The silence in his little cell palpitates with dreams, while across the plaster wall long shadows move like troops of cavalry. How malleable and alluring are the trivial elements which

the night brings forth in a solitary chamber in those moments when the brain is naked! And with what malice they tease for the dreamer's attention. Each element is an indication, an amplification. The slightest spot of mildew on the wall gleams like a battlefield. Great yellowish elephants move straight out of Hannibal's campaigns to march heavily over the geographic ceiling. A sort of physical breathing animates monstrously the beams and the whitewash. The smallest worm in the wood evokes the thunder of cannon. And at the centre of all this witches' sabbath of phenomena is a child of fourteen, dreaming. All the heroes of antiquity run in his veins. He is as pale as a god, crouching there on all fours over a map, the map of Asia. Watch his finger, dry as a bit of chalk and half as long, gallop over the mathematical paper. His shoulders follow his finger like a pair of wings. All his body seems to fly. This little head, flat and aflame, is swarming with sceptres, crowns, and empires.

King of Corsica, Nabob, Emperor of the Orient, these are his everyday dreams. Like an eagle's talon,

his imagination seizes the world. He is afire with imperialism. Now he is getting up, his stiff hair dangling over his ears, taking off his clothes, putting himself to bed. This little bed is a veritable library. Scattered like a flight of pigeons between the sheets, under the pillow, and across the blanket, are a maze of books. The thin, impubescent body struggles to make room for itself among these alluvial deposits of science. The boy thumbs books, tosses them aside, takes notes, and all the while the history of the world is running through his adolescent being. There he lies with Plato's *Republic* and Caesar's *Commentaries* in his arms, Sparta and Athens, sword and flower, on his chest, a stream of narratives running the length of his legs into Turkey, into China, and westward among the Incas. On his thighs lies the history of the Arabic Khalifate, on his navel the measurements of the great Pyramid, and under the soles of his feet the chart of the Brahminical sects. From the beginning, this youthful imagination was turned squarely towards Asia. How covetously the little Corsican eyes the road to India! Bit

by bit he dozes off, which is to say that he enters four-square into Alexander's empire. A vellum map, roasted a golden brown, drops down from the high stars, with the road to Babylon and the banks of the Indus marked in golden dots, the very road over which the child had so often sharpened his nail. On a Persian blue scroll these words appear: *Napoleon, King of Corsica, Emperor of India.*

* * *

From the time of his birth Napoleon had borne this dream of India in his left breast. It oriented and commanded his whole life. It was his straight line, his white plume. One evening, when his mother, Laetitia, was wailing over their poverty, Napoleon said to her suddenly: "Don't cry. I'll go out to India and I'll come back a rich nabob after a few years." He coveted and pursued India across Italy, across Egypt, across Russia. It was the central idea around which the mass of his life was grouped in a lyrical and tragical unity. Napoleon was a Corsican child besieging India.

Meanwhile, with India still in the distance, he was a little sub-officer without a copper. I have often racked my brain to imagine what the deuce this Bonaparte did between 1785 and 1794. Here are nine years (nine, the number of gestation!) which are curiously hidden and mysterious, nine years of incredible and monstrous obscurity, fermentation, seething agitation. I am tempted by this period of fever and dream, of misery and desire, this chaos of lightning in which his imagination was galloping through oblivion. Here Bonaparte's heart beat more violently and with greater wings than even at Austerlitz. Looking for the man, it is here that I find him.

Here begins the campaign of the wolf's tooth, the campaign of hunger. What a master's eye he must have opened upon the patrimony we call the Earth when he left the military school at Paris in 1785 with the rank of sub-lieutenant. But he fell from a high perch. He had to make his way to his garrison afoot, through the dust, move about to La Fère, Valence, Lyons, Douai, Auxonne—wherever he was sent—living the im-

poverished life of the army, poor and hollow-bellied, crammed, true enough, with Plutarch and with a sacred fire, but famished; reading, devouring mathematics and history, endlessly fashioning a thousand schemes, dreaming a thousand dreams in the sound of the peasant dialects in village dramshops or of creaking market carts or baying dogs; stamping with impatience, burning with eagerness, and for all, pay ninety-three *livres* and four *deniers* a month.

Anne, Sister Anne, do you see anybody coming?

Then came 1789. One fine day a band of laughing children shook that blue plum-tree, France. They shook from it red plums that intoxicated the lips of the world. In the turn of a hand the world shed its old skin. Stripped of her wigs and armorial bearings, France stood forth a naked virgin. Instantly Napoleon became a revolutionist. Not that he "loved" the Revolution, but he saw in it a splendid troubled water for his fishing. He recognized immediately the breadth, the rippling undulation of the event. To see history with the naked eye in its immediate relief is the prop-

erty of the hero. Geese need a hundred years of perspective.

Napoleon was twenty years old and wolf-toothed. He was off at top speed to Corsica. He was a Corsican. Before he could have India he had to have Corsica. He flung himself into the fray without a word of explanation. No sooner had he debarked than he was unpacking red cockades and distributing them to the children. At every crossroads he picked up gipsies and vagabonds and spoke to them of glory and liberty. Barefooted, open-mouthed, in yellow rags, like an immense cloak of bees, they followed him through the sun-laved streets. The Corsicans, being quasi-Oriental, are quick to lend ear. Out of the striped houses flowering with geraniums and hortensias, poured a quick-footed, chattering crowd avid of novelty. Napoleon harangued them and drew them after him. This rôle of tribune was a curious one for him, and he was never to play it again. Meanwhile, looking down upon Ajaccio was the citadel with its white garrison. The soldiers came down and made one mouthful of this brawling mob. Once

a half dozen leaders had been dropped into the dungeon, the uprising was ended. Off with you, Napoleon!

But the little lieutenant was possessed of the devil. He stirred about, intrigued. He got his brother a place on the town council; frequented the Republican Club; began to write a history of Corsica. What hard and golden activity! He drafted a manifesto which was sent off to the National Assembly. He made himself a chieftain. Already he saw himself master of the island, commandant of the National Guard, a potentate directing words and cannon. Once he was king of Corsica, it was only a step to Italy . . . and from there a midsummer night's dream took you to India. But Paris recalled old Paoli from exile and put him in command. Was Napoleon to step out of the frame? Was he to be second in Corsica?

Never! He decamped. He went back to his regiment at Valence. And once again he stood avidly interrogating the horizon, a soul on the watch. Everything that came his way was his prey: French Empire, Italian Kingdom, literary fame, money, what it was did not

matter. Time and again he risked all, and the obstacles, the defeats, the poverty, the ill-luck of this period make him infinitely human. Until the time of the Italian campaign we have the illusion that he is of our kind, that we can follow him. After that, he becomes unearthly. But thus far he is still one of us, except that his fever is higher and his avidity greater.

A new path opened up: the Academy of Lyons offered a prize of twelve hundred francs for the best essay on "the happiness of mankind." Napoleon set to work furiously. Strange phrases on the subject of happiness ran off his pen, "pale-faced ambition" was one. He sent his copy, and for eight days he waited impatiently, building Heaven knows what castles in Spain. But the Academy found his work "devoid of interest." What of it? He dropped literature and hurried straight back to Corsica.

Elections were being held when he arrived and the *sans-culottes* were the heroes of the hour. Napoleon flattered his friends, belaboured his opponents, and did both so well that he was elected. Naturally, the ballot

box went up in flames; the populace danced gaily about its bonfires. Meanwhile, he was meditating. The first thing to be done was to capture the citadel. A brawl and a bit of trickery lent him an excuse to lead an attack on Easter Sunday at the head of a mob of rapscallions, with a few notables of the town in Sunday attire serving as guide-files. Paoli knew nothing of this. The attack failed. Paoli broke him. His name was stricken from the army roll. And there he was, flat on his bottom.

He rushed to Paris. It was the red summer of 1792. See him soliciting in bed-lanes and antechambers, strangely solitary, strangely indifferent to the vast events that were transforming France in upheaval. Nothing interested him but himself and his dream of India. On the tenth of August, while the fishwives and blackguards were dancing madly through the sacked palace of the Tuileries he was roaming idly up and down the blood-stained staircases, calm, one arm behind his back, looking curiously on. Is not this as indicative of the man as the battle of Rivoli? Once he

emerged from his terrible silence and sneered: "*Che coglione*!"

But the Republic was in danger and Bonaparte was readmitted into the army as captain. Where was he bound now with his sword in his fist? The Rhine? Corsica, Corsica! What was the invasion of Champagne by Brunswick's Prussians to him? The pale, savage little Mediterranean pursued his obstinate dream. It is an extraordinary thing that while battles such as Jemmapes and Valmy were being fought, Captain Bonaparte was carrying on his war in Corsica.

There, Paoli was in supreme command. By dint of stubbornness and shrewdness he had succeeded in concentrating all power into his own hands and exercised a sort of dictatorship over the island. When one is Napoleon one has to cut down Paoli. Napoleon did not hesitate. One fine morning, on pretext of pursuing a herd of wild goats, backed by a handful of shepherds, he repeated his assault on the citadel. This citadel obsessed and haunted him. He was repulsed a second time. The Paoli party outlawed him. Outlaw Na-

poleon? But he was born outside the law; he is the archtype of outlaw! Forward! He collected his shepherds and servants and barricaded himself in Ajaccio. He was besieged and tracked from hiding-place to hiding-place. Political passion runs high in Corsica. The Bonaparte house was taken by assault, sacked, and burned. He fled into the semi-tropical bush, and from sheepfold to sheepfold, through a thousand ambushes and perils, he finally reached Calvi, where the French fleet lay. The Corsican dream was ended. Striking the ground with his heel, Napoleon embarked definitely for France.

* * *

Once again he led the skimpy life of a subaltern shunted about from camp to camp. The south of France was boiling over. Toulon had opened its port to the English. He took part in the siege of Toulon. It is commonly said that Bonaparte's impetus dates from this siege. Nonsense! It dates from the Italian campaign. At Toulon, Napoleon was a nobody, a little battalion commander. It may be a fact that already his

genius had inspired the staff and worked upon the army. But how are we to believe that after the victory the general officers made it a point to go shouting from the housetops that little Bonaparte had done it all? That would be excessively simple-minded. In reality, between Toulon and Italy, Napoleon lived one of the most miserable, louse-infested and terrible periods of his life. Neither in the army nor in Paris was he greeted with anything like the mad enthusiasm and the hallelujahs that marked his triumphal return from Italy. "Who is this General Bonaparte?" Junot's father wrote in 1794. "Nobody has ever heard of him." He cuddled politics a little, and smiled sweetly at Robespierre, and when Robespierre was gutted he was arrested and imprisoned in Nice. He was set free again, but remained suspect. To get rid of him, the Government appointed him to the command of the artillery of the Army of the West. That was practically retirement. He refused the appointment and was stricken again from the roll.

Banished from Corsica, stricken from the roll, alone in Paris without a groat, no job, no prospects, yellower

and sallower and scrawnier than ever, here was Bonaparte with his back to the wall. Where was India now?

He wandered, worked, dreamed, dared, and willed. In this dulled and blunted moment of his life he seems to me a professor of energy. He pulled his hat down tighter and clenched his teeth. He never laughed. Bourrienne writes somewhere: "We went to the theatre to see *The Deaf Man*. The audience was roaring with laughter. Bonaparte alone was icily silent." There he goes, sombre, preoccupied, through the streets and the antechambers. The a-b-c of a man who has nothing and wants everything is to try everything. You scale fortune before and behind, with your hands and your feet, to the last gasp. Observe this tenacity: what a man! This hero "earned" his star by the sweat of his brow. What infernal work preceded the celestial blossoming! It is thrilling to think that before conquering like a god he had struggled like a poor mortal.

O Bonaparte, how many times I have imagined you, summoned up the picture of you, in your darkest days, in those months of 1794 and 1795, when you reached

the peak, I say the peak, of your misery and your distress, the extreme point of your despair and your bafflement! How many times, and with what feverish hands and heart, I have peered at you through the key-hole of your tiny room in the Rue du Mail! I saw you musing over a map of the world, astride your winged blood; I saw you caressing some sword as bold as a Crescent, some one of those books in which the dead transmit to us the impetus and the savour of life; I saw you lying flat on your stomach in your scurvy uniform, drawing a map with a bit of chalk on the dirty floor. How many times I have come upon you thus at the age when, like a birdling, the heart essays its wings. How many evenings I have spent smoothing fraternally your temple and your black lock, kneeling at your calloused, twisted knees and licking frightfully your hands, your scrawny, bony hands! How many times I have looked long at you, face to face, breast to breast with you, penniless, hungry little general, mustard-seed blown across from the Corsican vales, child lost among us, O Bonaparte!

How insensitive, how indifferent, is this great city of Paris! And what a small place is held in it by an avid and solitary heart filled with imperial dreams! I remember the day, the soggy, rainy morning when, like a pale mad supernumerary, I arrived at the Lyons Railway Station. I could not believe my eyes, my steps. Bag in hand, I walked the sticky pavements in a sort of drunken dream. The taxis fouled me with starry mud; I knocked against beautiful, paradisaical women such as the birds themselves had never seen in the glossiest fields. True, these palaces seemed to me a bit dark, this air a bit heavy, for I was fresh from pure Languedoc, where the horizon is so suave and subtle that the poorest insect and the least willow leaf are as happy as the angels. But what of that! Nominalism distils its honey on the lips of men. I walked on, careless of the thought that hunger, cold, and ugliness might exist in Paris as readily as elsewhere. I strode along, my paper shoes soaked to the hilt, my little provincial trowsers floating at the wind's will about my tibias, and my decent Sunday hat set squarely on my

head as if to prevent my dream from flying off into the sky.

Yes, we know what it means to twist the devil's tail. Bah! Even the devil lends a hand to a man whose heart is high; and a man who has nothing thinks everything may be his.

No great words, no great gestures. But in a silence like that of the jungle or of the curving firmament, a fist, a hairy fist. Will and patience: these are the two legs upon which events march. Return a hundred times, a thousand times to the charge, ceaselessly, unreasoningly, tirelessly, eternally. But lucidly, by the gods! Old Tacitus, speaking like a good infantryman, said: "It is not necessary to hope in order to undertake, nor to succeed in order to persevere." A Latin like Bonaparte could not but smile at these blind words. He knew what he wanted, and knew where he was going. "Why? How?" These words were his left and right hands. An artilleryman's axiom: before shooting, aim!

He aimed. He was boiling over with projects,

schemes, dreams. "A ladder!" cried his soul. What! Could they not hear his cry, nor smell his savage breath, these Parisian rennets, these incredible and marvelous people? No: Bonaparte was a poor kid, like you and me. "He looked," wrote one witness, "like a booby, gaping at the buildings, like a farmer lad born to be swindled by the first crook who had a look at his face." How well I recognize him! Ah, I must confess that the reason why he has captured my pen and my heart is that he is my image and my model. I feel him because he is me.

The days went by while his eye grew hollower and his teeth longer. He pawned his watch. His soles were worn fine on the monotonous pavements. Three downpours curled up the brim of his hat. He waited, waited, on the watch for the slightest opportunity, the least star. He dressed once every eight days; took one meal a day, which consisted of a bit of cheese and a glass of beer; brushed his clothes himself; polished his own boots; never a passage of love ("I believe love harmful"). He tried everything: "Every day we invented a

new scheme." He rented tiny rooms. He threw himself into bookselling. For a whole week he was nourished and illumined by hope: this time, at last, he would succeed. But the plan went awry. What of that! He drew his belt a notch tighter, rolled up his sleeves a bit higher, and worked the harder. One evening, in the candlelight, Bourrienne, in a hoarse, mysterious voice, spoke to him of speculation. Inflation by the printing of *assignats* was at its height. They rushed upon it, for gambling is like glory: it exhausts the weak and nourishes the strong. The first attempt was a dazzling success; gold rolled in on rollers. How easy it was! Suddenly, a click, and everything crumbled. In an instant! Nobody knew how it happened. And out they went with tails hanging low. Ah, that monstrously melancholy cry on those lips: "Nothing I try succeeds!"

Here he is on a day in the month of Vendémiaire, tawny and greenish, roaming and dreaming along the quays of the Seine. "His boots were so singularly big that his skinny legs disappeared entirely in them." Yes, seven league boots. The weather was muggy. Tiles fell

from every roof. His heart was beating with the broad pulsation of a river. His long sabre trailed and bounced at his heels. He was meditating. There was talk of conflict between the political Sections and the Convention. Paris smelled of the pike. Was this the moment to use a sabre? Suddenly he gripped his sword: "Who wants this?" he cried to the birds, to the clouds, to the sky.

CHAPTER II

CONSUL OF ITALY

"By the grace of my sword."

—NAPOLEON.

II

Consul of Italy

NCE upon a time there was a boy from overseas, yellow and swarthy, crammed full of fairy tales and the marvels of glory. He was so short that he was called Little Tom Thumb. On Easter Day their Lordships made him commander of the Army of Italy, an army of fresh, lively, long-legged soldiers. As in a dream, he pulled on his seven league boots and began to chase his life. The mountains were made of pasteboard, and the crossing of a river was like living in a Persian miniature. He stripped cannon and crowns away as if they were the petals of a daisy. He was poor, simple-minded, and concentrated, and knew not what he was doing. He was a virgin. He did not know that here below, everything stumbles, drags, contradicts itself, or breaks. He went forward, and after each

victory a page was turned, as in a picture-book. Children in the town of Epinal drew penny pictures of him and his army, yellow, red, and green, and peddled them from village to village, crude as they were. At the least hitch a fairy would promptly appear (what was she doing there?) and set things right. Sometimes people called her the Arcola Bridge, at other times Desaix, or by another name. Whenever the bear showed his teeth he would slit open his belly, the way we do back home, and there was master bear, all four paws in the air. All this happened in cherry-blossom time. There was always a swallow on the battlefield—or an eagle.

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At the headquarters of the Army of Italy they were waiting for Bonaparte. The appointment of this booby had rendered the old soldiery beside itself with rage. Heads grew hot and bile was stored up. Masséna was there, and Sérurier, Laharpe, Augereau—a collection of shots who knew what they wanted, with chests like

barrels, moustaches a yard long, all of them pillagers, braggarts, and bandits, if you like, and as short of speech as a powder-barrel, feet broad enough to cover a province but too high to be stepped on. Each with roars coming out of his maw, they came and went, grousing and complaining, their chests covered with medals and shoulders hung with cords, the points and the edges of their great swords sounding against their hard heels.

"He's nothing but a cadet," one of them said.

"Street general," said another; "that's what he is. Killed four civilians on the 14th of Vendémiaire."

"He's Barras's minion, I say."

"They tell me he has the itch."

"Are they sending his wet nurse, too?"

"Let him come," cried Augereau, "and I'll pull his ears for him as if he had been stealing cherries in a field."

Suddenly the door opened. A little man a few inches high came in. 'Tenshun! Silence. You could hear the smallest fly in the Po Valley flying about the room.

Hands lay along the braid of the pantaloons. All these old lanterns were as motionless as candles. He, Tom Thumb, had taken three steps forward and sat down. He looked through the lists and examined the plans.

"Gentlemen, we leave tomorrow."

And he dictated his first proclamation:

"Soldiers, you are naked and underfed. The Government owes you much; it can give you nothing. I shall lead you into the most fertile plains in the world. Rich provinces and great cities will lie in your power. You will find honour, glory, and riches in them. Soldiers of Italy." . . .

All the giants moved out like crayfish in single file. Bonaparte, dry as a match, had a good look at these monuments of flesh. He came forward to Augereau, smiling, and pinched his ear. "I like you," he said. They moved on abashed, their swords between their legs, blushing like virgins. And that braggart Augereau, his chest like a wheatfield out in the wind, grumbled between his teeth, "That little mucker frightened me."

A soldier's point of view

"Dear Pépète, While we were asleep a new general dropped down on us from Paris. By God, he's as skinny as a nail and as young and scrawny as an altar-boy, and he's got a complexion that would frighten the crows. If my mother ever saw him, you bet she'd put him in the wash-tub and scrub him clean with a triple dose of ashes, or she'd give him suck, anyway. Our generals, the real ones, roar at him, and the troops would like to wipe his nose for him, which must be full of milk. They say he comes from Corsica, but he looks like those little gipsies who use a corncob on themselves and always turn up at home around St. Sarah's day. By God, he must be part blackamoor, too, because those islands are full of birds from Africa. You can't tell me this green and yellow Corsican is not a descendant of Mahomet's barbarians who used to sail over and raid Uncle Auguste's farmyard a few hundred years ago, God pay it all back to him! Those pasha fellows loved the smell of a Paschal lamb stew, you remember, and it never hurt their aesthetic feelings, to find a delicate

little brunette from Montpellier or Fréjus or Ajaccio, some alabaster and rose washerwoman—a good subject of the Sun King—in their bed. A drop of white blood must have been a treat to those lads, you know. Well, as Cicero said, *inde* our general.

"Meanwhile, they give us rotten spuds to eat, and we are moving on tomorrow.

"Marius Mangefigue."

The next morning the army was under way. Army? A mob of scamps who smelled very little of rosewater; a lot of clumsy, ungainly lads come tumbling down from their Ardèche or their Dordogne, who had been fighting since the days of Methuselah, hungry oftener than fed, but who knew how, once their bellies were full, to swell out their chests and eat up miles of march. They were old troopers, happy enough in the fire of cannon but even happier around the fire of wood. War was the general's business. They lent a hand now and then, like scarecrows frightening the magpies, but their real business was the evening stew. A hundred

skirmishes and a thousand nights of camping under the stars had hammered this into their heads. Anybody can pull a trigger in the midst of general uproar, conscripts and butter-fingers can do that. But when supper time comes, and you have to find twigs for a fire among the stones, scrounge a warm egg from beneath a setting hen, wheedle an old ham out of an old woman, twist the neck of a bird in a silent chicken-run, or slit the throat of a pig in its flower—there's the soldier for you! And it has all to be done without a hitch, without the good folk of the countryside knowing what has happened. Unless, of course, the farmer's wife be a choice bit, when a man can have salt to his meat.

Up with your pack! The drums are aflame and the trumpets afire. Reveille sprays its wakening shower over your ears. There is a smell of leather and a clatter of pots, and the tents fly off, and down the slopes of the Alps you go with a heigh-ho and a heigh nonny-no. The smell of lavendar and juniper is in the air. The twitter of morning is in the sky. You breathe in the

trees and the birds while nature brushes down your stomach. The straps grow into your shoulders. That swallow of spirits when you jumped out of your sleep begins to inflame your legs and tickle the soles of your feet.

Bit by bit the countryside before you begins to take form, grows geometric. Suddenly a belfry rises through the mist, and you see a whole village with the spine of its roofs where the angelus is in bloom. Your pack grows lighter; the bugles sound in the blue; there is a spring in the calf of your leg, and you waggle your backsides as you march. Pretty girls with dream-faces stand on their door-steps, smiling but still half asleep, with hay in their hair and their bosoms half exposed, so docile that a stroke of your little finger would turn them up legs skyward. Dogs bark and wag their tails. All the fowl of the earth seem to have foregathered on the village square, from the egg-yellow chicks to the stripe-throated cocks. With them is a thousand year old cat who seems full of memories of Tutankhamen and Assurbanipal, and two beardless goats but lately es-

caped from the affectionate goatherd dancing on the dung-heap, gleaming and diamond-coated like two harlequins, surrounded by a choir of ragamuffins who line up, red lipped and rosy cheeked, to let the soldiers pass, while already one of them, poorer, more solitary and more ambitious than the rest, stands alone and silently chooses the uniform he swears he will be wearing when he is twenty years old.

Beyond the village lie once more the immaculate fields with the dew of night on their blue blackthorns, the Veronese-green clover, and a firebird in a tree. Everything gleams with the brilliance, the smooth polish, of a drum major. Nature is painted in its Easter palette: pippin green and carnation pink. A rainbow lives in every spider-web, and every cockchafer, every one of God's little insects, is dressed in a vermilion shard and a carbuncle shell. And all this life blossoms and breathes and passes its day in the unwonted sound of the tramping boots. Out in the middle of a ploughed field a pair of oxen carry the mist on the tips of their horns. The blue swarms with skylarks. If the fancy

should take you to drop your pack you have no less than a handful of laurel leaves to do you office. You are on the threshold of Italy, and the rarest, the noblest, of perfumes hang from your shoulder. Meanwhile, the sun rises and the drool of the snails melts on the moss while you look. Clumps of olive trees invite you to rest. The regiment smells of pig's foot. Your muscles grow weary and your senses grow faint. The bugles ring like hollow bellies. The sergeant is irritated. It is time to halt.

From the heights of the farthest hills of Piedmont our poor and foxy Tom Thumb—"I am an old fox" he was one day to say—the poor little savage with the gold canine, gazes down upon great Lombardy, that pearl and bread of Italy, and his immemorial Asiatic instinct shivers at the sight of his prey in the sun. Italy: Jerusalem and the Promised Land! Who has not drunk your name even as milk? Who has not shouted your name aloud with the gaiety of childhood? Upon you are turned the eyes and the heart of all those who languish on the everyday pallet. Out of the deeps of

the north wind and from the knees of the darkness, the bear and the Eskimo, Goethe and Shakespeare, dream of you while licking their chops. What dreams do you not inspire, from the thighs of Venus to the tiara of the popes? Pleasure and divinity; mandolins and banditry; the graces of the chromo and the mask of Caesar; the facile and the great, O She-wolf, are suckled at your udder. You exalt all that is finest in man, and you give him the aqueduct and the fasces. You know no mist, no discomfiture, no paltriness, no disproportion, and no barbarism. Thou, eldest daughter, thou prodigal son, since time began thou hast been privilege, elect, choice, honey and gem and peacock. The ideal, and also the intrinsic. Thou art the visage and the smile of Madame Earth. Let others keep their forges and their iron works, and thine be the dance and the lily; Italy, daughter of marble and purple, rising-up of the sun!

Such were the thoughts of the shrewd impoverished child as he rode at the head of his war dogs. But here

was the enemy, a corps of brave Sardinians and well behaved Austrians, handsome and clean cut in their jerkins, manoeuvering like a ballet. Decent soldiers they were, hired and paid down on the nail, properly battle-scarred, sound of eye and limb, and well set up. Prancing and wheeling at their head like proper captains were their field marshals in cape and sword, Colli, Beaulieu, Alvinzi, all grown white in the harness (Beaulieu was seventy-two years old), crammed full of military science and etiquette, powdered and polished up to the nines, bewigged and beplumed to the queen's taste, and all with their full-dress swords. They knew what war was—a gentleman's game with its rules and usages all of which they had by heart. It was strictly defined, regularized, and as honourable as baccarat. How distinguished, how noble, how pretty were their Viennese manoeuvres! They knew every trick of the game, they had by heart the whole folio dictionary of its twists and turns; they were masters in this field. Never expect from them the slightest fault, the least deviation from regulations. They were the classicists

of military art. And only some trickster, some ill-bred interloping general. . . .

Ah, the great Trickster, the Delinquent of Genius, happened to be here before them. Bonaparte was about to check and checkmate in its beard this old army entangled in its beautiful strategy, its sytem of countermarches, sieges, and winter-quarters. Trickster, delinquent, iconoclast: the right names for this Tom Thumb, who came tumbling down the Alps without rhyme or reason to raise hell with the Laws of Warfare and hail upon them among the begonias.

This devil of a little man was possessed of the devil. He would fall upon you when and whence you least expected him and then vanish like a chamois in the Alps: cross rivers without a bridge; take towns by assault without a single cannon shot; fail to meet you where you would swear he was bound to be; leap upon you while you were at mess; harass you while you were retiring in dignified order; cock a snoot at you when you threw him the challenging gauntlet. In a word, he

would shuffle the cards in such a way that you were always bound to lose.

Is this fair play?

Little did Tom Thumb care! Before you knew it he had stuffed Piedmont into his haversack, and it was gone. How marvelous, on this Italian morning, to see his suppleness, his energy, his lively, cunning inventiveness, and to see in that fox-face of his which had so long been visited by itch and gnawing, the first shiver of success and the first saliva of digestion. At last, at last, after nine years of misery and waiting, he felt that today his chance had come, great-bosomed Fortune had passed his way. He made one leap, and was upon her. He delivered himself up to his destiny the way a child gives himself to a banister. What star is his? Is it the wine of a comet? The mascot of the chimney-sweep? He is varnished from head to foot. There comes an hour in which everything clicks. This is it. God in Heaven, do not change your hand!

Michelangelo, who had raced over the territory of form at this same rate, at this same pulse-beat, is his

brother. The Arcola Bridge reminds one irresistibly of the Tuscan's rhythm. And what is the state of mind of a Bonaparte if it is not the state of mind of the Creation of the World? To take chaos in the five fingers of one's hand and loose it again in the form of barges, domes, or eagles, and do this with a combination of immense enthusiasm and perfect order! Such creatures and such creators help us to understand the phenomenon of creation, which is the projection of a soul into physical space. Great white walls, a league of white paper, a vast blank future: you loose your dream and your heart over it by the agency of a vile brush, or a goose-quill, or a sword, and people take you to be some drunken slave. But you know well enough that you are inhabited by a higher lucidity, and little by little the white glows with colour and the blank space is peopled with figures, and life has been created. The great lyricist of imagery and the great lyricist of action, both alike, gather up and spread forth the spherical whole, the fluvial totality; they unroll a banner, unroll history, unroll the Bible. Their motives become the

wings of the masses. Their cavalry of mystery overflows reality. They seal the episodic with the seal of the infinite. This is the rôle, the mission, and the thrilling pleasure of heroes. For this reason it is hard to imagine them otherwise than restless in the beginning and at the end of time—on the first morning of Genesis, that freshly dropped egg, and on the last night of the Apocalypse, that final roll of the drums.

Strategists and historians have celebrated his cold science, his impeccable method; they have gorged themselves on these. Alas, the same science and the same impeccable method were, a few years later (particularly in the French campaign), to come a cropper. It is true that Bonaparte was a good electrician and marvelously apt at laying wires. But there were times when the current flowed, and times when it did not. Why? It is the greatness, the vanity, and the delight of those who busy themselves with digging into souls that in the end they always knock their noses against the door of God. There is a threshold man can never cross, a point at which intelligence and intellect are

halted. Beyond that point begins the climate of the miraculous.

I see in Napoleon only luck, miracle, and heavenly benediction. He knew it, for he credited everything to his star. Recall how his greatest triumphs and his greatest disasters, Marengo and Waterloo most of all, hung by a thread. Nobody was more conscious than he of all that was magical, imponderable, and spontaneous in a battle. He speaks constantly of ceaseless invention and improvisation, seeing it as a living thing, a palpitating sort of dark mysterious unicorn which had ever to be tamed anew and perhaps even bewitched. "The fate of a battle," he said, "is the result of an instant, of a thought. Two armies move toward one another with different combinations, come to grips, fight a certain length of time; then the decisive moment arrives, an inward spark declares itself, and the tiniest reserve does the rest." And again: "I have observed that it is always the quarter-hours which decide the fate of battles."

His plans swarm with topographical details and

commissary details: choice of stages, state of roads, level of water supplies. Everything is foreseen in the domain of manoeuvre, nothing in the domain of battle. It is as if on the threshold of the burning and mobile phenomenon called "battle," this greatest captain of the world stopped mysteriously short. On the eve of the battle of Jena he said, tapping his forehead: "I have my plans here; but nothing, nothing on my maps. . . . Choose a site from which I shall be able to dominate the battle-field." And it is more beautiful thus, more solemn, more pathetic. Victory demands the intimacy of the chief, the smell of his skin, his star. Is war an art? Yes, but "an art which cannot be learned," said Napoleon.

Inasmuch as this is true, the genius of Napoleon—with all that is positive and specifically earthy in it—plunges its roots into mysticism, into destiny. After Napoleon, and despite Napoleon, man can no more explain Victory than he can explain Beauty. He was born in battle. For nine months his mother bore him from bivouac to bivouac, from skirmish to skirmish, in

Corsica. If it is true that in this period the impressions of a mother are mysteriously and delicately instilled in the vague flesh of the embryon, then this child conceived and born in the sound of cannon could not but be a soldier. "I was born a soldier," he said.

"All is fair in war," sang Tom Thumb; and this is the equivalent of "It is God's will." Plumes and bravery and chivalry meant nothing to him. But to fall like a thunderbolt upon the cosy quarters of some pig-plump army; follow the trail of a body of troops redolent of hare and pork; rob an enemy corps of its supplies in the first dew of the dawn; force a squadron of cavalry into an issueless bog; to be in at the death in some corner of a wood, some corner of the sky, reddened by the vermilion of blood—there you have the excitement and the mission of this little pirate with his sibylline and tawny eye. After them! after them!

But hear what Mangefigue says.

"Dear Pépète, By the Tarasque of Tarascon, this Bonaparte has got a fire under his arse! He drags his army along as if it were some hang-dog rogue. For

weeks we have been marching like hell, winning battles with our legs. You can imagine what we say about him in our tents. But the strangest thing is that everybody is overjoyed. This little mucker has a way of saying things and working on your feelings that makes your innards turn over and over. You can say what you like about what tripe honour is, and glory, and so on, but by God it is something after all. (Between ourselves, it seems that they are talking about a couple of stripes for me up at G. H. Q.)

"Anyway, these two weeks past we have covered more ground than you ever heard of in your geography books. They have walked my legs off me. And by the way, send me a ream of cotton and a little ipecac against the fever, will you? They tramp us through miles of sand-and-water salad where even the bulrushes won't grow. And saving your respect they call it the Po. As for the Sardinians, we have given them three or four sound drubbings and have seen the last of them, I suspect. They may have made peace, for all I know. Now it's the Austrogoths we're up against.

"What a rich and beautiful and easy country this Lombardy is. Life is good, Pépète. We go out mornings, the way you would go cherry-picking, through the olive groves and the rice paddies with no baggage and no food; but lads from Marseilles are always able to smell something to eat in the offing. There is always a medlar tree about, or a frog in a marsh. Can't you see one of those fat pink frogs toasting and picking its juicy legs on the end of my knife over a fire of twigs and waiting to warm my insides? And when he's down, there's a dozen snails swearing at us in the coals, eaten from the point of a sharpened stick, the way they eat them here. Snails are afraid of water, of course, And if you look carefully in these parts you can find a wench who will hand out a goatskin or two of wine in exchange for a chuck under the chin. And on lean days we get along with nothing more than a hedgehog or a blooming mole. Stripped alive, rubbed with olive oil, and toasted on the spit of an osier wand, these little beasts perfume the air. There is nothing like a fire and its good friends the ashes to tame a little wild

animal. As for field mice, I admit that they turn my stomach. But there is a lad here from the Balearic islands who can dish up a snake stew to the queen's taste. Where he comes from, they serve them up in a juice of vinegar, laurel leaves, and herbs, or merely boil them in vinegar. I like to watch him strip them from head to tail and then chop off their heads. The ones they have here have a sort of transparent meat that is rosy, tinted, and damned delicate. Of course I don't say that the smallest quail. . . .

"When we've eaten, off we go belching and singing bawdy songs. Once in a while we fire a gun, and a few chicks scatter. If the fight gets hot we send for Bonaparte, and when he moves up the enemy lights out. The Austrogoths are frightened to death of him and haven't enough rivers to put between them and him. The Bormida, the Tessino, the Adda: nothing has been able to stop us. But the air and the powder whip a fellow's throat-flap, and a potato here or a linnet there isn't enough. When noon comes and you have seven or eight leagues in your boots, your eyes burn like hell

and your insides howl to be fed. And if on top of it all it is hot, then you can hear the grousing up and down the line. But we usually reach some big town full of orchards and farmyards and dung-heaps, with everybody scared out of his wits when we come along. We blow into the houses on pretext of hunting for stray Austrogoths, and somehow we always come away with a ham or a basketful of eggs or an ancient bottle all decorated with spider webs. It always happens that if anybody misses a capon the damned thing turns up in our soup. A miracle! the good people cry, and we answer, a miracle! First grab, first served, these days. Every pocket is stuffed with sausage, cakes, and grapes. We heap it all up around the camp fire, and then dive into it. The iron pot smokes while the saddle of a mountain-kid stews and sputters in it. And nobody complains, let me tell you. We jump grace without thinking about it, and dip into a bowl of olives while we wait. But the best is this:

"An old scout with a nose for these things pulls out of a hempen sack a little porker all ears and legs, one

of those squirming hundred-pound pigs with virginal flesh and the smell of aniseed on him. The beast squeals like a corporal. We slit his throat with a single stroke, bleed him over the sink-hole, singe off his hair over a straw fire, and peel away his skin with our nails, all of us. You burn your fingers doing it, but it's worth it. There is a smell of burnt rind that chokes you, but that doesn't matter, for here is our little porker, whiter than a virgin's breasts. Then we rip my lord pig open with a bayonet and give part of his innards to the dogs and part to the magpies. After that, lovingly, voluptuously, we stuff his belly with everything we can find: quinces, limes, thyme, laurel-twigs, chestnuts, almonds, cloves, Spanish peppers, muscadines, pepper, fennel, fat onions, asparagus, and even a bit of cheese, a pint of spirits, mushrooms—if we have any—and a fistful of garlic. When all this is well packed in we suture him stoutly, truss him up with wire, and fling him on the fire, a great fire of blazing vine faggots, crackling with sap and whipped by a lively breeze. And when all of this porker is well porked, ah, Pépète, the sky grows pale

with appetite for him. The pigeons on the roofs look down and ogle us, and you can bet that if Jupiter had wind of it he would come tumbling down from his bleeding throne. The smell of a great roast makes the heavens shake. But suddenly the trumpets sound and we have to cut up our manna while it is still half roasted and half milky. And we stuff it down, long smoking beautiful slices of it, cramming ourselves to the ears with the honeyed meat, gulping it with our eyes shut. What is left we wrap up in a cloth, fling it over our shoulders, and on we go, covered with meat and skins of wine and nubbins of bread-loaves, looking very much like some barbaric horde, some Hunnish tribe. But isn't he a Hun, the little general riding at our head, skinny, brown as a nut, with a stolen chicken swinging at his holster? Is he not Attila in person?

"Marius Mangefigue."

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At the end of two weeks, abashed as well as beaten, the Sardinians sank into the earth and Bonaparte lent

his attention to the Austrians who were religiously awaiting their turn. Upon my soul, they all seemed to have been eating of the mandrake root; they never budged. A boot in the behind or a biff on the ear left them calm and ceremonious as ever. The casual way in which Bonaparte took the bridge at Lodi was magical, incredible. Listen to him: "I was young, full of life and impatience, burning to enter the lists. We marched forward and everything made way before us. My name was as dear to the civil population as to the soldiers, and this concert of homage touched me deeply. I became indifferent to all except glory. When I passed, the air resounded with acclamation. Everything was ours; everything was at my feet; but my thoughts were all for my brave men, for France, and for posterity. The beautiful women of Italy displayed before me all their seduction, but I gave them no heed. However, my staff took good care of them. There was one, the Countess C——, at Brescia, who presented my brother Louis with a pledge of her favours which he long remembered."

The whole Italian campaign is marked by a light-heartedness, a freshness, and a rapidity which are incredible. Was this strategy? Or was this not rather some sublimely preposterous diddle-daddle played by a crowd of children with bullets in their pockets and malice in their eyes, fighting gaily with all their hearts and at the same time all the precision and good luck of high ingenuity? "My sword is at my side, and it will carry me far," cried their young chieftain, the youngest soldier in the world. And they went. Theirs was a fabulous chorus of victories, each more bloody than the last, and each with the sap and firmness of cherry-flesh. Lodi, Castiglione, Arcola, Rivoli—the names form a pure litany. Beaulieu, Wurmser, Alvinzi, Archduke Charles, whose turn came next? "The French do not march; they run," exclaimed the Roman prelates. They take one general, drive him into a swamp, and asphyxiate him by slow fire. Another they padlock in Mantua. A third, who sought to practice the Art of Warfare in a brilliant manoeuvre which consisted in sending forth five columns through five val-

leys to envelop the French army, they met at the cross-roads, and from one quarter-hour to the next they picked off and annihilated each of the successive columns. It was simple and round, for the genius of man is like the flesh of the child—without a wrinkle.

In a few months Lombardy and Venetia were conquered. The road to Vienna was open, and they took it. And while his ragged veterans were frolicking and sharpening their swords upon alabaster, he, the slender Mediterranean prince with the blood of Rome and of Canaan in his veins, was raising his field-glass to his eyes and training it, beyond the plain of the Po, beyond Venice and Constantinople, beyond Bactria and the Taurus, upon the Orient.

The Italian campaign ended with this proclamation: "Soldiers! The taking of Mantua has ended the campaign. You have been victorious in fourteen pitched battles and seventy combats. You have taken more than one hundred thousand prisoners and stripped the enemy of five hundred field pieces, two thousand guns

of high calibre, and four pontoon sections. . . . The colours of France fly for the first time on the shores of the Adriatic, twenty-four hours by sea from ancient Macedonia."

CHAPTER III

PASHA OF EGYPT

"I saw myself on the road to Asia, perched on an elephant, a turban on my head."

—NAPOLEON.

III

Pasha of Egypt

TWENTY-FOUR hours from ancient Macedonia. What did this mean? It meant that Macedonia was the land of Alexander the Great, and that Tom Thumb's dream was to march in his footsteps. Italy in his eyes was but a stage on the road to India. One jump from there to Macedonia, another from Macedonia to the Ganges; that was what was burning his brain.

And yet Italy was abundantly agreeable to the marrow of his bones; she was the precise climate of his blood. Throughout his life his imagination returned with a shiver of delight to her. Even at St. Helena he exclaimed: "If I had done what I purposed, I should not have fallen." And what did he purpose? "I purposed to make Italy a compact power over which my

second son should reign. . . . Rome would have been its capital." The caution with which he never failed in warfare to plan a line of retreat is well known. Italy was the pear he saved for his thirst. If France should one day happen to grow too hot for him, he would be able to fall back upon Italy. He thought of it in 1814 at Fontainebleau. "Well," he said, "since we are forced to renounce the defense of France, does not Italy afford a retreat worthy of us? Let us march on the Alps." At any rate, after Leoben he seems to have lingered long and pleasurably over his conquest. He took up his quarters in the castle of Montebello, near Milan, where he lived a royal existence for six months. Of course he thought of this territory as his own: "by the grace of my sword." Is it not axiomatic that possession is nine points of the law? The little pirate had picked rich Italy as if she were a cherry, and put her in his pocket as if she were a toy. This is the ancient meaning of the word conquest. And the original meaning is appetite—appetite of the belly and appetite of the heart. Here below, whether peasant in his field or king in his

crown, man works only for his own account. Indeed, this is to my mind the great argument in favour of monarchy. Even the saint is selfishly concerned with winning his heaven. Maurras exclaims about it somewhere: "Ah, this myth-loving imagination which tends everywhere to make us believe that birds and bees, and heroes and heroines, whatever be their exploits, their honey, or their nests, work for others than themselves!" It is impossible to doubt that for an instant, at least, Bonaparte, the master of Italy, caressed this dream—to remain there, make himself potentate, Consul of Rome.

But a prouder, a more mythical, a more august dream haunted him. From the cradle to the grave he was impelled by one secret devouring thought: India. "I shall come back a rich nabob." And here, purple in the gleam of the glory of Rome, he dreamed of himself as Emperor of the Orient.

As a fact, he was a kind of Oriental. "You Frenchmen," he would say. The Grand Turk and the maharajahs were always in his mind. Even his name was not a Christian one; and as for his wife, she was a Creole

of the isles, an Oriental in a way. A mameluke guarded his door, and his horse was named Ali. He was, in truth, a yellow and russet sort of Mongol, a pure nomad galloping between the Rhine and the Yellow River, raiding and burning wherever he went. Whatever Napoleon built constituted a springboard. His rifling Italy of her pictures and treasures; his juggling with the crowns and sceptres of Europe; his bombarding of his brothers and companions-in-arms with kingdoms, principalities, and duchies; his blowing up of the Kremlin—what does all this prove except that he was of the race of Tamurlane? And what else is there to say of his Italian volubility; the gipsy-fashion in which he bestrode a horse; his carelessness about his clothes; the way he pulled humanity by the ear, boxed the heads of all his friends, never bothered about women (six years at St. Helena without a woman, and indeed meagrely endowed for their pleasure: "*partes viriles exiguitates insignis sicut pueri*"—a detail which may be of capital importance in history)? A broad streak of childishness in his character (remember the

chase after the rainbow), and along with it a sardonic, cynical, truly diabolical side to his nature, point to something Mephistophelian about him. 'If our father could see us now" he said with a droll little laugh on the night of the Coronation; and what a characteristic remark that was. "A man like me is either a god or a devil." Moral sense? Don't make me laugh. A capital of the Parthenon, lying in the grass, says "Good" to you. If it comes down on your head it says "Bad." There is your moral sense. He was a thoroughbred galloping along and crushing the daisies. "You talk like a pedant!" God exclaims.

* * *

It seems to me that the adventurous, the chimerical, the insane nature of the Egyptian expedition has never been sufficiently stressed. Think of exposing the greatest army of France to the hazards of a sea voyage in which there are ninety-nine chances in a hundred of being waylaid by Nelson's fleet and sent to drink salt water at the bottom of the ocean. Really, it is impossible to look upon this as anything else than a child's

escapade, the adventure of a kid fascinated by the Orient. I refuse to believe that when he embarked at Toulon he had any notion of ever returning to France. "I shall stay in the Orient," he wrote. And when he was asked, "How long?" he replied, "Six years, perhaps." He confessed at St. Helena: "If Acre had fallen I should be Emperor of the Orient today."

He left his Lombardy and returned to Paris. There they spoke to him of an invasion of England. England? Who would bother? "Europe is a mole-hill," he said. "There have never been great empires except in the Orient, where six hundred million men live." And again: "Great names are made only in the Orient." And the poor Directory could say nothing but amen. It appointed Bonaparte "Commander-in-Chief of the Army of the Orient." What milk to the soul, that distinction! He flew to Toulon.

Toulon: arsenal and love-apples. Red pompoms and steel-blue sea. A city of the Orient. Toulon's senses are ox-red and mackerel-green. I remember a lane winding uphill between two rows of stalls and the rising voices

of the thick-waisted vegetable women crying their wares: "Apples! Love-apples!" At their stalls they were the great, dense wenches who know all the tricks of the dawn, sun-ruddied and standing stoutly in their hot *sabots*, with their fists on their haunches as if defying the gods of the markets; an organic and soldierly band running the show, their faces gleaming like church windows. Seeing them in that atmosphere of gay uproar while they move from one customer to the next, ogling the little scullery maids, nosing into the market-baskets, tripping over the boxes and bushel-baskets and a thousand obstacles and hindrances strewn all over the ground; seeing their discipline, their lively faces, their strategy, the way they have of pushing forward some bit of girl-bait or dropping a friendly secret into an old man's ear; hearing their cooing insults, their whines like those of over-ripe bitches in heat, and from time to time their cat-like miaouwing, one wonders of a sudden if what they sell there that goes by the name of love-apple is really a tomato or is love itself.

In this spring-like gaiety Bonaparte quickly set about the organization of his expedition. Soon all was ready and the army embarked in the month of May on a flotilla of flutes. The wind rose. The flagship was called *The Orient.*

Bonaparte's luck in the Mediterranean is unbelievable. By what charm, by what ellipsis, by what sleight-of-hand was he able to glide through the English squadron as between raindrops? Nelson was on his heels with great oaths, turning out the sea as if it were his own pockets, and each time he missed him by a second. "The devil has the luck of the devil," said the old sea-wolf to himself.

They took Malta on their way, and sighted the Egyptian coast towards the end of June. "The first city which we shall see was built by Alexander," reads the Order of the Day. In the steps of Alexander!

They disembarked in a heavy sea, and by chance or by design, Bonaparte touched earth first with his left foot. He was always a believer in portents. Standing on the earth of the Pharaohs, a golden emotion strangled

him and all the pores of his skin shuddered. On this day he had reached the country of his imagination, the threshold of that desert about which, from his beginnings, he had mysteriously dreamed. Charms and sighs seemed to rise ceaselessly together out of those sands. Here even the ibis touched earth only with one foot. On this immaculate ground a man's walk was a dance in attendance.

Meanwhile, bark by bark, the army disembarked. The milky silence of the twilight, the slooping of the sloops, the soft pearly clouds bedded on the blue silk, a thousand million turtle-doves in the pale date trees—everything conspired towards a sentimental end, lent to the event the savour and the sense of an adventure, a sort of kidnapping. The kidnapping of Bonaparte by the Queen of Sheba. And then the moon rose.

Under the shining stars, at three o'clock in the morning, Bonaparte reviewed his troops. The moon, that womb of the night, sat enthroned in its seraglio. Ruddy, almost animal, flashes undulated in the wide firmament. The beach was strewn with shells and gleamed

amazingly. The slime of the Nile exhaled its sacred and insipid odour. And this religious scene was peopled by a Gallic rabble, conceived in a night of orgy on a dung-heap or under the stimulus of the acrid spoilt wine of its dirty backwoods; innkeepers and horse-traders as proud as Xerxes of their new boots. Cries, curses, and the clatter of tin pots sounded squalidly against the delicate throat of the darkness. And yet over this military uproar there floated Heaven knows what magical seal. Ah, children of carnivores, you may whistle as much as you like and bare all your teeth as you curse away into the sky, you are nevertheless in the grip of an emotion your hearts have never known before. What is the deep and raucous bird-cry that sounds from the tip of that tamarisk? Off shore, the frigates lay at anchor, as motionless as mummies.

In this enchanted air Bonaparte alone knew where he was bound. But one day before, on board the high-pooped ships, he was merely the general of the Directory. But when he set foot on the earth of the Orient he left behind him all of Europe and dropped into the

sea the instructions written for his guidance in Paris (which, I believe, forbade the conquest of Egypt). He was alone and free on an unknown continent; and already his glasses were trained on a spot beyond the Nile. What was Egypt to him, what was anything to him but a sort of white springboard from which the angel of appetite was to bound towards its star?

Alone: fullness of freedom, fullness of authority. An immense plain under the soles of your feet and a horde of soldiers for ladder. Yes, alone and on his own account.

The next morning they took Alexandria almost without a shot. On to Cairo!

The way to Cairo was through the desert, a place of witchcraft painted verdigris, where thirst plunges its beak down into your heels and each grain of sand draws a drop of your sweat. But how marvelous, what blue irises in your eyes, when you come suddenly upon the Nile. Instantly men and generals rushed pell-mell with great cries into the water, on foot, on horseback, arms widespread and teeth gleaming. The horses drank

till they swelled and reared themselves up gleefully out of the ticklish water, tails in air and eyes shut tight. The men lowered their faces in to their ears, lapping and guzzling and snorting and belching. They stripped off their shirts and flung handfuls of water over their chests; oh, those running drops of water dancing over your belly and making a paradise of your navel! They plunged into the river and splashed about with gurglings and lickings of the tongue; then bit by bit, gorged with water, a sort of drunkenness seized them. They bombarded one another with handfuls, spoonfuls, capfuls of water, until the old Nile was but one flaming roar of laughter under a downpour of rain. Some swam; others washed their legs; the horses dropped their dung on the golden foam; and meanwhile the river carted off to the Mediterranean, to the sea of Byzantium and of Rome, a cargo of dust, sweat, filth, hair, fusty odours and spittle, while the sun shone like a lily overhead.

Thus purified and baptised, the army resumed its march, whistling. Thenceforward they followed the

river while a freshness as of watermelon hung in the air. They were dazzled by this new country, by its chequered fields of beans and corn and onions and its strips of sugarcane. The smell of clover lightened their packs and a desire to frisk and tease and sack overcame them. They tickled the long ears of their horses with papyrus wands. Yellow brats raised their shaven heads fearfully on either side of the banked road, and the soldiers tossed them cakes, or stroked them with their shoes. A team of buffalo lay snoring in the shade of a fig tree; the troops tipped their horns with tomatoes. They passed a pottery and saw a fire of dung smoking meagerly, surrounded by bottles and jars warming their curved handles on the polished floor while the potter, tattooed with plaster and mud, stood up to his waist in the slimy black clay, thoughtfully turning a vessel on his wheel.

But here was Cairo! Here were the pyramids! Here were the mamelukes! The mamelukes were a sort of military oligarchy which governed Egypt by the sword and the horse. They pooped disdainfully in the direc-

tion of these foot-soldiers. "Infantrymen!" they sneered, and they flashed their scimitars in a thousand graceful evolutions. "We'll slice those watermelons in two!"

Beneath the walls of Cairo on the bank of the Nile, togged out in gala attire, they were ranged in battle formation. What handsome fellows! Georgians and Circassians, most of them, daubed with paint like so many wooden soldiers, dripping with leather thongs, virgin steel, silver-gilt caftans, each holding in his fist the damaskeened yataghan inherited from his father and tempered God knows when by the sweet mouths of the poets of Damascus and other towns. The broad plain gleamed and glittered and rippled in a flood of silks and breastplates and fluttering banners. Here and there a spur glowed like a diamond. This cavalry shone like an Oriental bazaar.

From the tops of the ramparts all Cairo looked down upon the show. There were women and children wrapped in immense scarves of orange and green silk; magistrates with henna-dyed and finger-curled beards and purple turbans; enormously tall, skinny marabouts

perched on their toothpick tibias, all of them swarming and gesticulating on those granite walls whose rosiness was more flamboyant than jewels. Smooth-tongued swindlers moved from group to group offering to the highest bidder virgin pigeons and elephant hair. Incense-burners smoked on the topmost towers, wheedling the will of heaven. In the background the four hundred minarets of the town played leap-frog from cloud to cloud. What were they expecting? The harem favourites were there, veiled in velvet to the eyes, and beside each one, bearing a sunshade with carved head, sat a blackamoor on the stone parapet, his long naked legs dangling miraculously white in the void. The women threw oranges, burnt almonds and poppies to the warriors and shouted to them those caressing words which make a man's hair stand on end till it reaches the seventh heaven of delight. The purest of them blew kisses as broad as beds. And the most beautiful of them, in a sudden gesture, unbuttoned her heart and drew forth first one and then the other of

her ceremonious breasts whose loveliness would drive an armless man mad.

Meanwhile the poor devils from the Limousin, from Picardy, and from Brittany, formed in hollow squares, stood there abashed and waited with open mouths for the golden shock.

"Soldiers! From the heights of these pyramids forty centuries look down upon you."

An avalanche! Twenty thousand mamelukes, behelmeted, begemmed, bespangled, fire-spurred, flung themselves forward at a gallop on their little orgiastic horses, shrieking their wild gibberish in a palpitation of silk, sand and sun, like a blinding gleam of enamel. The Orient was advancing.

All this phantasmagoria was crushed like one great egg against the impeccable squares. Yellow, white, and blood-red splashes bestrew the ground like bird-leaves. In vain did the beys, immaculate as swans in their ivory stirrups, essay to rally the mad fantasia. In vain did they lead them again and again in the charge with blows of pistol and papyrus. In vain did the holy

sheikhs come forth in person to swear at the guns and exorcise the cannon: the cannon remained deaf and only spoke the louder. Towards evening, seeing that the decimated mamelukes were wavering on their ponies, the French troops, weary of the time lost in this clashing, clattering incantation, took the offensive. The end had come. The mamelukes, half enveloped and forced back to the Nile, scattered. They fled along the river bank and took to the water, some swimming, and others in barges. They were picked off among the lotuses like so many ducks, duck-shot on horseback, at their oars, singly and in clusters, cheerfully, hilariously.

And then came the plunder. The soldiers spread and ran through the Turkish camp, their noses in the air, smelling booty everywhere; and while one came back with a camel, another brought forth a chest of oriental sweets. There was something to be had for every taste, something to suit each of the seven cardinal sins. The lechers flew from tent to tent, ousting in the penumbra some miraculous houri who was instantly turned like a turtle on her back in the cool sand. The gluttons sprang

the locks of the commissary and gorged themselves on gazelle meat and sweets and aniseed, and carried off sacks of flour. Everywhere trotted the thousands of Arab horses who were caught by their long braided tails and led away. There were carpets a league long so soft that a man's soles tickled when he stepped on them; there was chinaware smoother than a woman's skin; phials of perfume and phials of wine; and all about went on an uproar, a dancing and a chanting, a cascade of unimaginable pillaging. What did not these soldiers lug and trail about with them—silverware, rosewood tabourets, amphorae of all shapes, candelabras of coral, magnificent robes of state, heaps of enamels and jewels, orgiastic instruments, pillows and pommades, asses' milk and sultans' medals; the most absurd, the most impossible, and the most useless objects, certain to be flung by the roadside on a day of dripping sweat, but which on this day touched Heaven knows what delicate and mysterious chord, what burning desire, in these pure barbarians.

What a strange voluptuousness lives in the curt

words "to sack"; what immemorial joy it sends through the marrow, and how firmly it sits on the original soul of man! To smash, to violate, to massacre—and for nothing, purely out of pleasure; are these the authentic mandates of life? No sooner has the spider of society set him free than this dancing insect, man, returns to his instinct, which is to say, to himself. He seems to recover in these moments some long-lost hunger and to leap prodigiously into the primitive fatherland of his flesh, the lyrical climate of the first salted and vermilioned age of man, the innocent barbarism of the original blue dawns, the plenitude, the ease, the angelism of the games played by hairy hands in the Easter prairies of Paradise first emerged, the day of fatted calves, green apples, and mother Eve.

Little by little the booty was heaped up and overflowed; and then as by enchantment the battlefield turned into a market-place. Seated crosswise on a handsome Abyssinian corpse or squatting between the legs of a disemboweled horse, the soldiers swapped their finds, their trophies. Strange traders, these soldiers who

knew nothing of the marvels now first fallen into their hands, had never seen anything like them on their pig-farms, played innocently at the game of Arabian Nights, selling cameos by the tumblerful, purple cloths by the pound, sweet-basil by the bale, and angelica juice by the thimbleful. Everything was up at auction. A pearl necklace went for a mouthful of bread; ermine skins for a cluster of dates; lambs thirteen to the dozen; and camels at five coppers the hump. Who was there without a little porker, without a pair of brocaded slippers? Carbuncles and sapphires rolled in every pocket. Thus did these shouting, powder-stained ingenuous warriors try naïvely to gain a little cash by their victory, amusing themselves like children who had discovered a nest—ostrich or odalisque nest—tricking themselves out in turbans and sacred cloths, the youngest recruit holding the glass while the corporal, in a hyacinthine dressing-gown, sketched a few dance steps and grimaced lovingly at his image. Sheban picnic feasts were improvised on the mysterious sand imprinted with the footsteps of the ibis. The men

licked their lips and beards clean of candied fruits and treacle; sank their teeth into the rind of watermelons; sucked sugarcane and tootled clarinet-wise on the stalks. Drunken with malmsey and sweets, they gambolled and swore gleefully while the fatty corpses lay strewn here and there like hieroglyphs. Crows hung croaking in the negress-pink sky. And when all was gone there was still more to be had, for the rich Maccabeans floating on the Nile could still be fished out and stripped. They were harpooned with long reeds and drawn up by their feet on the bank; and you may take my word for it that they were deloused clean. Down to and including the pubes. Their uniforms were crammed with piastres and pearl-handled poignards, and wrapped in capes that would put a bishop to shame. Purple-faced, they lay in rows on the sandy shore like sardines under the rising moon.

Somewhere under a laurel-tree Bonaparte was sleeping.

* * *

There is something prettily symbolic in the picture

of all these French soldiers wrapping themselves gaily in turbans. These historic banks, the victory of the Pyramids, and sparkling Cairo seem to have turned completely every noddle. In truth, these were mad troops, clearly inclined to adventure, with roots which went only as deep as the Revolution. In Cairo these empty flaming heads now revered nothing but bazaars and seraglios. You should have heard their Gallic salt when they sprinkled it over Mahomet's Paradise! Each man thought himself just the fellow to be a mameluke or a vizier, and there was no corporal who was not fit in his own mind to be a pasha.

Nor did Bonaparte discourage these notions, since they contributed to his most secret designs. His dream had a certain charm,—to cut loose from Europe, divest himself of the Christian world and of old Reason, and find rebirth in some fabulous Oriental life. And destiny seemed to be lending a helping hand to this metamorphosis; had not the French fleet been destroyed by the English at Aboukir? "Alone at last!" murmured Bonaparte. Hear him: "In Egypt I was unhampered

by the brake of a restraining civilization; I dreamed of many things."

He felt after this victory that he was on the right road, that the wind was favourable to him, and that great India in its nest was after all within reach of his outstretched hand. Written in the sand at the foot of the Sphinx he saw the undeviating line of his life in the hieroglyphs: Corsica, Italy, India.

Isolated from France, free and absolute in the wide world, he gave himself up leisurely to his dream. He organized Egypt firmly, determined to make it his base of operation, his fortified frontier. Instinctively his mind and his manners took an Oriental turn. He had a Turkish sabre, a Turkish valet named Rustan, and he attended in great pomp the celebration of the Nile. "His solemn meditation in the great mosque of Cairo was admired," one chronicle says. He felt himself at home in the Sultan's shoes. The people called him Sultan Kebir, and he loved to think of that on St. Helena: "When I entered Cairo the Turks, who had measured my height by the renown of my victories,

thought I should be at least six feet tall. When they saw me and saw that I was not as tall as one of their mamelukes, my prestige was lessened. . . . I pretended to be inspired.

"I said to them: 'Sheriffs, mullahs, orators of the mosques, let it be known to the people that whosoever shall in the lightness of his heart declare himself our enemy will know no rest in this world or in the next. I could if I chose demand of each of you an accounting of your most secret thoughts, for I know everything."

Did he go as far as to flirt with Mahomet? Did it occur to him one day that he might become a Mahometan? Did he perhaps whisper to the sheikhs that the Republican Army might conceivably be converted wholesale to Islam? Nothing is more probable and Bonaparte was entirely capable of such a thing, for he juggled jolly well with religions. To the Turks he said, "It was written in the beginning that after having destroyed all the enemies of Islam and torn down the Cross I should come to you out of the West." And to the

Italians he said, "I am a Catholic. I have fought against the Turks and am almost a Crusader." Whatever the inner truth, it is certain that colloquies and palavers took place. But hear what Napoleon had to tell Dr. Antommarchi about this:

"The sheikhs proposed to me that I don the turban. 'We'll see.' You shall have one hundred thousand men. All Arabia will flock to your banners. 'What about abstinence? We should die if we drank no wine.' The use of it may be tolerated. 'And circumcision?' Not indispensable. 'Well,' I said; 'if that is true then we are all Mussulmans.'" But when Dr. Antommarchi remarked, "It was said, Sire, that you had all been converted to Islam," Napoleon answered, "We had no time to lose in ablutions."

Yet behind this game of manners and this Turkish painting, his imagination never once lost sight of its prey—India. He was sinking his foundations, entering into relationship with the Pasha of Damascus, the Shah of Persia, and the Sultan of Mysore. He was constantly concerned with the erection, adjustment, and

details of his grandiose imaginative structure. Listen to the dream of this young man of thirty, such a dream as only children and Gods do dream. "I take Syria and march on Damascus. As my army advances it is strengthened by all the malcontents of the country. I arrive at Constantinople at the head of armed masses. I overthrow the Turkish Empire and found in the Orient a new and great Empire." And again: "One grain of sand clogged my career. If Acre had been taken, the French Army would have flown to Damascus and to Aleppo. In the twinkling of an eye it would have been on the Euphrates, swelled by the Christians of Syria, the Druses, and the Armenian Christians. I should soon have had more than six hundred thousand men. And I should have reached India. . . ."

* * *

"I saw myself on the road to Asia, perched on an elephant, a turban on my head." Instead of an elephant he sat on a scrawny camel with a stringy hide and cruel humps. Where he needed an army of forty thousand men with forty thousand camels and one hundred

twenty cannon, he had been able to collect only thirteen thousand men, and he was off under the stars. The army crossed the Syrian desert. It took Gaza, Jaffa, and then marched on Acre. Stuck up on his poor ruminant, Bonaparte rode at the head of his troops, and from time to time found himself alone without them. His eyes, vastly avid of gems and myrrh, saw before him only the desert, the sun frolicking in the mauves and, while the real and the illusory clung inextricably entwined beneath the blue skullcap. Great blond dogs loped along the desert track, leaping from hillock to hillock, barking with their pink tongues. There was nothing to be seen save, from time to time, the lonely tent of a Bedouin, a long-eyed woman milking her long-legged goats into purple goatskins, and a child wailing loud enough to be heard in Bagdad. Here and there an oasis, and beside the well a group of blindmen moving in single file, waggling their ears and chanting in nasal voices. Like sounds heard in a seashell, fluid and pure, came the distant voices of flat-nosed Negro boys going from oasis to oasis, climbing

with their flat feet the Arabian acacias in order to pick the blue pods. Camelling alone at the spearhead of his army, Bonaparte mused. The genius of heat sent its caresses into his bones. His blessed and subtile body sweat marvels. What is a mirage if not the flesh of our other soul? Out through the blossoming pores, entrails and desires pour forth on their lark; the multicoloured populace of desire rises up out of our eyes like Venus out of the waves. Space has not gardens enough, not springing glades enough, to contain all our appetites. The atoms of our ego dance like monkeys on the taut cord of the horizon. The camels drop their smoking turds on the golden sand and a thousand firebirds quarrel greedily with yellow beaks and rosy wings. A forest like those painted by Henri Rousseau rises up in a mass, as on a stage, its trees frog-green, each leaf giving a hand to its sister leaf, its fairy-fingered moss spinning dew. What is this enchanted path? In olden days this was the silk road. Here on their white camels rode the merchants of Tyre and Rome with the bales of silk they were bringing home from China. Has all

this silk proliferated? Or are we really in the suburbs of India? Bonaparte shuddered, his pomegranate head burst, scattering the seed of his dream. Silk invaded his understanding.

Are these lady-bugs or cantharides, butterflies of caracul or of *gioggiolino*, the kind with fisher-flowers on their bellies and wings variegated with dawn and snow? or are they not, rather, hinds, greyhounds, unicorns, transparent animals? or are they after all fairy maidens still marvelously drunken with all the virgin forest dew they have lapped in the hollow of their tongues? or are they birds, more delicate and full-bellied than birds in nature, birds of coral or of flesh, painted one by one by hand by the rainbow on a brilliant day? are they teal with crystalline paws and velvet palms? or some flight of storks, or a covey of peacocks? In the imperial garden, swung up without the aid of ladders into the mulberry trees, are white yellow creatures moulded flat against the morning, carrying baskets like none ever seen before. They are the ladies of the Court come to pick silk leaves. These beautiful

children perform their part with too much zeal, with an art too exquisite, not to reveal in themselves some secret instinct, some propitiatory inclination. It was their ancestress, the Princess Hsi-Ling-Shi, who on a day of genius invented the miraculous thread. Did she invent it, or did she not rather, through love, come upon it in her imponderable marrow to which the coarseness of men had for a time relegated it? We can scarcely doubt that silk was the first physical substance which issued forth from the Supreme Being. He drew it from his breath, spun it in his beard, with that naturalness so characteristic of him. And when he had a skein of it as big as a bird's egg, he formed woman out of it. Thickwitted Judeo-Scythian brains have assigned to woman, they say, some sort of slimy origin. They are simple-minded men who spell out their texts letter by letter, like children. But we who swim between the lines, by God, we know what's what! "Flesh of woman, ideal silk, thou marvel!"

There they are, a hundred or so of these girls heaped in the black branches of the mulberry trees, laughing.

They laugh as hard as they can and spring from bough to bough, a sprig of rush between their teeth. Dyed scarves float behind them, and the breeze plays in such wise as to reveal diamond-shapes of shoulders and circles of haunches to whet the desire. How agile were their toes! Some were enthroned astride the great branch of the tree, their legs dangling downward out of sight. One of them, who had climbed up into the highest tip, was straining towards the sky as towards a lover. Here was one plucking fistfuls of leaves and there another picking them daintily off with the tips of her fingers. Five of them stirring together in the same tree formed monograms of arms and legs against the background of leaves. Violet, red, and yellow cloths were spread beneath the branches, and the leaves poured ceaselessly down into them so that after a bit they were heaped with wriggling, subtle masses that undulated like clouds. Crack! a bough broke and down tumbled a towsled girl, her nose blue with fright. The liveliest of them seemed to walk on air and the most melancholy threw their arms longingly about—alas!—

the tree-trunks. When the wind blew through all these trees at once, the picture turned into a dance.

The worms gobbled this provender in the twinkling of an eye, and the grace of metamorphosis drew from them soft cocoons in myriads, which myriads of patient shining men spun, lost in thought. Scarves and sunshades will be made of them to bloom upon girls and gleam over kings. And from century to century the poets and the magi and the women will sing their praises unendingly under the names of blatthin, *d'meseq metaxa, habutal, tussur, amru, muga, samite, scarimant, ciclatoun, damask, tiercelin, sendal* . . . and so on . . . and so on.

CHAPTER IV

DREAM-INTERVAL

"A grain of sand clogged my fortune."
—NAPOLEON.

IV

Dream-Interval

"IF Acre had fallen I should be Emperor of the Orient today," said Napoleon at St. Helena. Alas, he broke his head against Acre; he broke his soul against it. This was beyond doubt his greatest defeat, a thousand times worse than Waterloo, if a broken heart may be said to be worse than a broken head.

Gone was the glittering escapade. Back to the sheepfold, to law, the shepherd's crook, and Reason, the sheep-dog. Back he went to Paris, and if his tail was not between his legs, at least his wings were folded. How melancholy this resumption of reality! It was the ancient fable of Icarus, the myth of Prometheus, the tale of the prodigal son to whom all the fatted calves in the world were so much tripe.

The mirage having faded and the house of blue

cards having fallen in, it was natural that he should, like Candide, undertake to cultivate his garden—France. But for such a man to be Emperor of France was but second best, but an alibi. We have here, between 1800 and 1812, twelve years which deserve to be called the Dream-Interval. Europe, that Harlequin of little lands, had never excited him. When he left for Egypt he called it a molehill. And in 1811, when it became his, he called it "a rotten old strumpet." And yet he married his old strumpet. Oh, a marriage reasonably arranged, of course.

But was he to lose himself in sighs and tears and womanish whinings? There were tears for his broken dream. But once he had disembarked, he drew forth his watch, eyed the chessboard. The first round lost . . . we'll try again.

"Alexander went a distance as great as from Moscow before he reached the Ganges. I repeated this to myself after Acre." Moscow! Since 1800 he had been dreaming of Moscow. The Orient was closed to him on the sea route. Very well, he would reach it on foot. One

thought clarifies and commands this dream-interval—to seize Europe in order to drag it at his heels to India. What he could not succeed in doing with thirteen thousand soldiers he would one day try with five hundred thousand.

Attempts have been made to whitewash Napoleon, to paint him as the apostle of peace, the precursor of the League of Nations, the darling of the ladies' societies, and so on; in a word, to present him as a human being. Monumental error! To humanise a God is literally to belittle him. You measure him by the yardstick of utility. Good people, I readily concede that the veriest greengrocer is a more useful person than Napoleon. Napoleon was a man who bore a dream in his heart. Doubtless we are all Napoleons. The timidest shop assistant carried a kind of bomb in his left breast. Everybody dreams of miracles for himself, incredible adventures, a life of gold and roses. Everybody dreams of his India, for to live is to dream. The only difference is that we have no faith in our dream; we think of it as contraband, as a kid's toy, while for Napoleon to

dream and to act were the same. He carried out his dreams on the spot, brought them to birth in the sunlight in flesh and blood. Our dreams are a sort of useless key lying idle in our pockets.

And, quite properly, he carried out his dream by every means, in particular by the sword. Not that he was one of those warriors to be sated only by blood, licking their chops and their fingers in streams of blood. A pin-prick upset him, and at the battle of Eylau he was as scared as a little girl. But the sword is an incomparable instrument of power; and was not Napoleon the incarnation of the Will to Power? The conquest of Europe is not the act of a soldier, but the thought of a Nietzsche. Napoleon brought into the world a kind of religion, the religion of force, the religion of possession. Napoleon and Jesus, those two Orientals, symbolise the only two replies which man can possibly make to life—Yes or No. One is the religion of "here below"; the other the religion of "elsewhere." Does not the very name Napoleon call up to impatient adolescent ears some new Sermon on the

Mount: Come unto me, ye who have muscle, sap, and determination!

But France was to be dealt with first. She was vegetating in anarchy, weary of carnage, bled white in this year 1800. He showed her his laurels, his keen, virile jaw, and sent forth a roll of drums. The 18th day of Brumaire, when he made himself Emperor, was the matter of an instant. He sealed it with the battle of Marengo the way you seal a new love with a kiss.

And then the inventory. Everything was destroyed, dungeons in ruins, houses in disorder. His mighty arm raised everything, patched and chinked up the holes and crannies. His first care was for solidity, even at the risk of uniformity. "I was born a soldier"; but here he showed himself a great civilian, founding like Romulus a city with the aid of a plough. Prodigious, Protean omniquity. "What is it about?" were his first words. And whether it was about warfare or the Code, Poland or the St. Quentin Canal, he took one look, straight, full, and square, and solved the problem. A highway, a museum, or the manufacture of Jouy cloth was as

much in his purview as a battle, and it was in these that he gave his measure as a man. It was no more difficult—and no less—to invent beet sugar than to conquer Italy. It is marvelous to see him, not jumbling and messing things about as some have said (people have been astonished, even scandalised, that in the midst of the greatest military perils at Moscow he should stir about in the petty quarrels of the *Comédie Française*), but grouping, embracing, and harmonising the four winds of life.

What naïveté, but what intelligence too, in the gesture of that Norman deputation come to beg the First Consul to devote forty-eight hours of his time to Normandy! What a strange passage from the qualitative to the quantitative in these dazzled minds! What a fantastic town, to calculate very simply the output of genius!

In truth the genius of Napoleon was a gown without seams, a crystal globe. There were no compartments in his mind. Like a lamp, he gave off light concentrically, in every direction. And spontaneously. What is genius

if not lucidity, second sight, multi-sight? To penetrate to the heart of things is a question of sight. God is the eye of the world. Napoleon's intelligence had the thread, the acuity, the freshness of Adam's eye. Our senses have long since "accustomed themselves" to the world. We are all Daltonians, mentally. Knowledge has become a pair of spectacles. We know through the spectacles of Aristotle, or Jesus, or Descartes, or the Reformation, or the Revolution. Each of these is a pair of spectacles. Each genius, each era, has painted the world in its image; and all we see is the painting. Napoleon was a sort of first-man, a kind of integral autodidacte, who perceived and judged all things without the aid of any intermediary. He seized things in their original essence, their virginity, let me say in their nudity. His was the genius of the naked eye.

In Napoleon, life hit the bull's eye. The division of energy between muscle, head, and heart, the perpetual equilibrium of his being between will, sensibility, and imagination; these were curiously ambiguous in him. What have those parasites, those mistletoes, heart and

moral sense, to do with the substance of man? The Napoleonic species, having reduced that viscera, the heart, to its specific rôle of viscera, emerges in all its smooth, spherical simplicity; a nervous radiation is chiselled fibre by fibre in its plastic pulp. Here all the physical energies of the blood flow unimpeded to the sovereign brain where they filter into intelligence and are transmuted into mind. All the sap of his being blossoms in a sheaf on his brow. And this brain, in its turn, far from tending towards isolation, towards entity, far from aspiring to form a state within a state (intellectuality) plants itself in the paradisaical soil of his skin and his marrow. Thus nature, escaping from its discordances and antinomies, wedding the male powers of the brain to the female powers of the flesh, created at last its own perfection in that grandiose unit: an animal spirit.

* * *

The Consulship, the Empire, the "banners of consulship" and the "imperial trappings," the throne of kings and the sun of Austerlitz—all these, we con-

cluded, therefore, are mere police and notarial operations intended merely to bring order into his affairs before he undertakes the journey dictated by his heart. They are household accounts, balance sheets, last minute chatter. What was he thinking about while he was discussing the Code, signing the Concordat with the Pope, cantering at Schoenbrunn? "My battles? They were never more than a part in very vast combinations." It would be puerile to follow the manuals of history in imagining that all Napoleon's life was contained in his brilliant gestures, his victories, his administration. Napoleon? Oh, yes, people answer,—the Civil Code; the battle of Marengo; Austerlitz. For my part, all these are but a false front behind which I discern the agitation, labour and creation of a soul given up to a dream; an entanglement in appearances and in the ignobility of reality, and finally the secret, melancholy, lingering death of the dream-filled soul, vanquished by time lost. There you have the true life, behind the screen of banners and triumphant arches. And that is what tempts the inquiry of the poet and makes his

creative mouth water. The identity of man is in his orientation. Man is an arrow flying at the heels of a dream. My aim is to disentangle this dream, seize upon its central idea and pole-star in the welter of facts and gestures. What a man does in life is but a sketch—sometimes even the contrary—of what he dreams. We dream red and live grey, alas! The red dream alone is my passion. I have not beard enough to be an historian.

As soon as France was shipshape, sound of limb and well in hand, he threw himself impatiently upon Europe. But Europe was a prudish housewife who understood nothing about him. She was horrified by adventure and frightened of dreams. Was she? Then she would have to be raped. Austerlitz gave him Vienna and Jena gave him Berlin—sister and brother. Europe lay in his pocket. There remained damned old England. Napoleon cursed and detested her as much as he did, precisely because in his eyes she represented the unattainable, the inaccessible, the sparkling, the gnat in the fable.

England was the thorn in his side, and he was to lose

ten years of his life—all his virile maturity—in the attempt to draw forth that thorn. One after another she forged coalitions and raised armies, and one after the other he beat them. Who next? But time was flying. The drama of Napoleon is in these humble struggles between the dream and the stupidly earthy, in these poor altercations between himself and the porter in the skies called Friedland or Jena. It was not in Russia that he lost himself, nor at Waterloo, but at Austerlitz, at Wagram. These victories were the playthings that amused him, and betrayed his destiny; the pacifiers with which babes are put to sleep. The great, the irreparable disaster was that long leap from 1800 to 1812, legs in the air and teeth gritted. How slyly Fate regaled him, stuffed him, intoxicated him with glory. And then what? "I am off to Vienna" said Tom Thumb; "alone with my little conscripts, my name, and my great boots." He scaled the highest mountain tops without a sack to his back, galloped from plain to plain, and flew gaily from bank to bank of the rivers. Dawn found him bathing in the Bavarian dew; noon,

breaking his fast on the highest peak of the Tyrol; vespers saw him picking daisies along the Vistula. He roamed across Germany, his pockets filled with kings. At Sans-Souci he caressed the sword of Frederick the Great, and at Schoenbrunn the daughter of the Emperor. Of a sudden he was in the cathedral of Burgos, the most violet cathedral in the world. He played at blind man's buff with golden crowns and at God with the Pope. For his soul was shod in seven league boots. And what next? Weave your victories, O Corsican Penelope; one by one old Time is unravelling your days. Age comes, and your dream starts, nonplussed.

His dream? Whenever he spoke of India, a witness reports, "his eyes shone with a strange gleam." Do you know what he was thinking about in 1808-1809? "Let a great fleet be built for the Mediterranean against Sicily and Egypt." At Tilsitt he refused to give up Constantinople to the Czar. Why? Was he still dreaming of being crowned Emperor of the Orient there? While all the world thought him preoccupied by thoughts of the continent, of his English and

his Austrians, his soul was out there, in the Orient.

How strange and universal is the fascination of the Orient! What man born of woman has not shivered at the call of those magic syllables? We seem to feel in the marrow of our bones that this is our maternal climate, the primitive homeland of the human seed. Only the past is alive. Imagination itself is a form of memory. Our past surrounds us. To imagine is to see again. We whirl like star dust in what seems a mad vortex, whose axis is the past. It is our house, our snail-shell; for a moment or two we roam and smile caressingly at the clouds, but at the least cry we crawl home. To dream is to hunt in our memory the woodcock and the unicorn which the dust of our ancestors once knew and possessed; it is to hunt Paradise. What is evoked in our age-old hearing by the fateful word "Orient" is the vague immemorial and immortal image of terrestrial Paradise.

* * *

England barred the way to his dreams. He turned his attention to her, and suddenly in the man's little

head (brain of 1,200 grammes) there germinated one of the most grandiose and fantastic thoughts ever born on earth: the continental blockade. Sterile, they say. History judges by fruits; so did those birds who, seeing a masterpiece by Apelles, flew to peck at it. The sterile continental blockade, that masterpiece of the imagination and one of the most sublime of earthly gestures, belongs clearly to the family of the monsters of art, to the sterile Moses of Michelangelo, to sterile Beethoven.

A definition for social use: A great man is a being disgraced by reason, who avenges himself for good or ill—usually for ill—by mad grandeur.

The day finally came when Europe surrendered. Towards 1812 Napoleon was able to take up again the Indian campaign which had been interrupted at Acre. "Why, but why," moan the historians, "why did he not settle down in 1810? Why did he not begin to enjoy his wealth, and barter his boots for a pair of fireside slippers?" Because, dear spineless scriveners, the work he had cut out for himself had then scarcely begun; because this was merely the beginning of his dream.

The inexplicable and unexplained Russian campaign was dazzlingly unveiled in all its meaning and fatality by Napoleon himself in these words: "They want to know where we are bound? We shall finish with Europe and shall throw ourselves like thieves upon India. . . . I must take Asia from behind. . . . Imagine Moscow captured, Russia beaten, the Czar reconciled to me or dead; and tell me that an army of Frenchmen and auxiliaries marching from Tiflis can find no way to the Ganges, and that the touch of a French sword will not suffice to bring down all India. . . ."

CHAPTER V
SATRAP OF MOSCOW

"I shall be a second Attila."
—NAPOLEON.

V

Satrap of Moscow

N a day in June with dawn-filled pockets, Napoleon stood musing beside the river Niemen. About him the dew gleamed on the rushes, and before him the glaucous river rolled on its way beneath an azure and orange sky. The tender spectacle of this new-born day and the magic of Holy Russia seen now for the first time flooded Napoleon's soul, and he trembled. He dipped his fingers into the water and made a great sign of the Cross in the face of the sacred sun. Then, slowly and alone, he crossed the bridge into Russia, his *Grande Armée* of five hundred thousand men waiting behind him on the near bank. He set his foot, his left foot, down upon the Russian soil, treading with lucid and lyrical step this unknown, mysterious, quasi-Asiatic, Slavic earth. A pale bird in a dwarf

willow chanted a soft and raucous and half-liturgical air. Like a priest, as in a dream, his bones dilated and his pores starred with banners, Napoleon strode forward.

What freshness of soul was in that gesture, what childish devoutness, what a reversion to that superstitious little Corsican for whom here was a time when he could not look Fate in the face, nor thunder, nor the sea, without making hasty signs of the Cross! I like to think of this potentate tiptoeing into Russia like a child into a church.

Indeed, everything in this incredible campaign had an air of mystery, and nothing was more justifiable than Napoleon's state of mind. The Italian campaign had been one of children, of green sparrows, and of sunlight. In Napoleon's life Italy represents the physical prey, the temporal prey, wherefore we understand the completeness with which he seized it in his grasp. It is in fact the only land he did truly and intrinsically seize, for it was all a matter of those things which are understood by the mind, palpable to the touch, in-

formed with reality and humanity; fowl and field apt for tooth and claw, pure animality.

Already in Egypt the mummies had disturbed this state; there was something strange and sibylline in the country. There we had the campaign of the lone heart, the high blinding noon, the eagle curt and clean. Egypt was the legendary prey, the prey symbolical. There things had no body, no earthiness; the imponderable pulled the strings. A bird in one's hands became sand. Jerusalem was not far distant, but it was out of reach. Small wonder the cannon came home chopfallen.

As for India, that was to be the impossible prey, the prey ideal, the dream pure, to be attained by no man born of woman. Napoleon had determined to take it by surprise, from behind, via Moscow. And his hands grasped the void, oblivion. Too far, Napoleon, and too old! The greatest of men has bequeathed to us this lesson: man born of earth can seize only that which is of the earth earthy.

Here was the campaign of peacocks and swans, of

the bird-filled dream, the campaign crepuscular. Twigs and flowering branches engarlanded the *Grande Armée*, that Babel of the Occident. How was it possible that a bit of unreason should not glide into this phantasmagoria? Even the soul of the monarch had taken on flesh by now, alas. Hear him ask with such simple-mindedness: "Which is the road to Moscow?" What does Moscow look like in his imagination, in the globe of his mind? There is something of the Persian despot in his adventure, for he is of the great race of satraps and khans. Cyrus, Attila, and Genghis Khan, rather than Alexander and Cæsar, are his peers and brothers. Is not his rôle in the matter of the continental blockade reminiscent of Xerxes, encamped on the seashore with a bludgeon in his fist, ready to whip the delinquent waves? But more symbolically Moscow stands in Napoleon's eyes for the Land of Marvels, the Land of Ikons, the Land of God. The Russian campaign is the expression of an attack of mysticism. In this man's crisis of the middle years, the prime mover was God.

While he traversed thus the first few acres of Russian soil, alone with the liturgical chant of the bird and filled with that pure voluptuousness which only stars and virgins dispense, a cavalcade of people stirred into motion behind him. For this supreme crusade, which was to end in some dazzling place, at Kabul or on the Ganges, perhaps, he had collected all the armed rabble of Europe, hordes which were at once the equivalent and the counterpart of those led by Attila and by Tamurlane. It was therefore meet that he, the Great Ingenuous, the Great Intrinsic, march alone at the head, but outside of, this barbarian host. He alone stood for mind, passion, mankind, before these five hundred thousand atoms of dust.

Behind him moved troops of every tongue and every nation, from his Guard in its fur bonnets to the negligible fife and guitar players, Savoyard cowherds, Tyrolians, cavalry in plumes, shakos, busbies, and a whole quiver-full of quivering sabrery. Poles, Bavarians, Saxons, Italians, Danes, Spaniards, and Portuguese chattered and whined and twanged and growled in

their separate tongues, all of them with hungry teeth and itching fingers and eyes gleaming with arson and theft. In the twenty years during which an endemic plague of warfare had beset Europe there had been formed in each country a sort of great company of bandits, each with its own laws and customs, each omnipotent in its own sphere. This soldiery had no other motive force and frequently no other resource than ransom, skulduggery, pillage, and murder. Warfare was to them a fountain of money and honey. "We were all insane," an aide-de-camp of General Chambarlhac later confessed; "we thought that a military career brought nothing but honour and fortune."

You cannot make war for twenty years without losing some of the urbanity of civil life, and it was not to be expected that soldiers go about with clean hands. These soldiers were excellent troops and saw very little difference between good and bad. They were healthy fellows ingenuously delivered up to their instincts, their maws. The marshals who commanded them surely knew more of strategy than of metaphysics, and

more of the vocabulary of the guard-room than of the language of the flowers (though there were a few with some knowledge of the heroic imperfect of the subjunctive). Certain of them were of lowly birth, and all were somewhat coarse. A libelous pamphlet printed in Russia has left us these naïvely indignant sketches, to be quoted with a smile:

Murat: the greatest and most sanguinary of scoundrels.

Junot: the most sanguinary, the most cruel, and the most violent man in the world.

Masséna: a violent temper, sordidly avaricious, and a great lover of pillage.

Davoust: an utter barbarian, sanguinary, covetous, and extremely violent.

Augereau: a man of abominable morals, with the convict's brand on his shoulder, who had served his time in the galleys and was an avowed thief and brigand. The greatest pillager of all the marshals of France.

Moncey: a scoundrel.

Soult: violent and pitiless.

Vandamme: a violent and sanguinary scoundrel.

Ney: a perfect brigand.

Allowing for the fact of the war, there was still some truth in these compliments. But on the march the soldiers became as handsome as Gods. And any little picture will suffice to offset a little barbarism and a bit of pillaging, for example, Murat swathed in crudely coloured scarves and covered with gold braid, charging bareheaded, and hands in pockets at the head of his troops.

This immense flock of soldiers drew at its heels an even greater flock of sheep and swine; convoys of Bavarian flour and Lombardy rice; a whole comet of commissary supplies, munitions, medicaments, a deluge of carts of every wood and fashion drawn every-which-way by Catalonian mules, Croatian buffaloes, Calabrian donkeys; a hundred trains of siege and pontoon equipment harnessed to oxen; fourteen hundred cannon in the charge of artillerymen of seven nations, one hundred fifty thousand horses: And all

this rumbled over the roads of Poland with cacophony and sweat, sweeping clean every blade of grass and every wild berry in every hedge; drying up rivers at a breath; raising storms of dust which the setting sun and an optical delusion transformed into triumphal arches. A clattering train of rolling kitchens sent forth the grease and the odour of boiling tripe and was followed by flights of crows and birds of prey moving mysteriously overhead like a black milky way, while the bewitched little dogs of the steppes crowded to sniff with their sphinx-like muzzles at the tail of the convoys. Was this an army, or was it not rather a vast exodus of peoples, one of those cosmic migrations that strike out in one era or another, from Germany to China, the multicoloured uniforms representing the rainbow-coloured rags, the Scotsmen the women, and the Neapolitan conscripts the children? The same appetites and the same emblems were here as in a migration. Was it not a satrap who commanded these multitudes, the satrap of Moscow?

In silence, the satrap of Moscow rode over the steppe.

Gone was the Italian flame, gone the Egyptian flame. Here was a man of mature years, musing and calculating. One of the bitterest things ever said in the world was said by him: "One is no longer at forty-five what one was at thirty." Even the face of war seemed changed. Nothing on these plains evoked or recalled the free customs of arms, the sovereign play of the sword. The enemy retired ceaselessly without firing a shot; retired, retired, retired. He burned his villages and his holy cities, devastated his soil inch by inch and twig by twig; swept the land bare. What sacred madness possessed him? what sublime sadism? The *Grande Armée,* leaping over rivers and conflagrations, rushing madly through this sly, elastic space, was at his heels . . . and everywhere there was nothing, nothing. Where were those damned Russians? They glided between willows bluer than blue, between rays of sunlight more oblique than those which fall from cathedral windows, between our fingers. There was witchcraft in this; the devil was at the bottom of it. "I'll come up with them at Smolensk," Napoleon said

to himself; and he put two horses at the artillery shafts where there had been but one before, abandoned his parks, lightened the packs of his grenadiers. Forward at the triple gallop! And a delirious and perfidious race began across this directionless steppe, a race like that in an American film, under a sky richer and more sepulchral than a mummy. Bit by bit the impedimenta and the dead matter dropped by the wayside, the cannon wavered, the heavy cavalry stopped, out of breath; the soft conscript troops collapsed beside the road. The *Grand Armée* stripped itself of its paunches, its chrysalides, transmuted its strength into agility, emerged a butterfly from its cocoons of light-horse, blue *chasseurs*, and pink flying squadrons. The Guard flung away its packs and flew like the wind. At the arrowhead of this arrow flew its subtile principal, its brain-point, Napoleon.

Nothing, still nothing, but curtains of hectic Cossacks borne off by the laughing wind. This emptiness was maddening, halucinating. At last they reached Smolensk . . . in flames! Then Napoleon stopped.

Like a man in a dream, he rubbed his eyes, stretched and yawned, and bathed. "Let it go at this," the luminous Latin voices within him murmured. He slept ten minutes with his palms on his thighs as was his habit. His guardian angel sat solidly perched above him. His pulse died down, and so did his imagination. "Well," he said to his marshals, "the campaign of 1812 is finished." The army would settle down into winter quarters at Smolensk. He would send to Paris for novels and an opera troupe. In the spring they would turn again to the business in hand.

The next morning, when Berthier arrived to organize the winter quarters and regroup the army, he found Napoleon bowed over his map with a gleaming brow. Three pins pricked the world: one at Moscow, another at Tiflis, and a third on the Ganges. "Quick, quick! we are off," Napoleon cried. "The wine is drawn and we must drink. I want to go to Moscow."

They went. The bewildered regiments wondered if they were going to Moscow or to Paris. To Moscow, to Asiatic Moscow! Napoleon knew no longer where his

armies were; he was in a dream. Never had he dreamed so much. He left his troops whole days together without orders. His general staff complained. He seemed in the grip of some vision, some incantation. He marched towards Moscow like a first communicant going towards the Eucharist. Every morning they came to him and told him that he had lost ten thousand horses in the night. "Farewell to them," was his only comment. A mystical intoxication aureoled his face. This Russian land seemed to give off some luminous malaria, some innocent opium. The brush of the steppes seemed to ferment and chant; the wild oats of the fields and the very lichen of the tundras seemed to moan beneath his tread. The trees were white and the muzzles of the cattle were soft. Standing beside a burning farm, two lambs looked at him with the eyes of little angels. The village belfry rang in a tone of languid desire. The very stones seemed to wear their heart on their sleeve, and the ants were praying to God. An odour of apples and of incense sweetened the air and enervated all the Russians. Napoleon moved forward

weighed down by a cope of lethargy. The Muscovite dust drew mysterious figures on his boots. He was drunken and ill with Slavism.

Meanwhile, the Russian Army had halted at Moscow. What madness! Why did they do it? Instead of drawing Napoleon on to Nijni-Novgorod and Kazan, on into the solitude of the Urals whence he would never have returned, they stopped and made ready for battle. The French marshals rubbed their hands. Battle was their bailiwick. At last, they would be able to exercise their arms in blood and, exorcise their bewitched souls in blood. The night before the battle was kermess night; spirits ran in rivers throughout the camp, which was lit up by great pine trees flaming where they stood. The army ate and danced and gambolled in mad Gallic fashion while the bivouacs stank of resin, grease, powder, and starlight.

The Russians prayed.

The next morning witnessed the battle of the Moskowa, a bloody and sterile hecatomb. In this hazardous disorder the lucid genius of the Emperor failed to

function, the guns rusted, and the grousing soldiers moved ineffectually round and round. An evil angel seemed to have paralyzed the *Grand Armée*. Some maleficent power seemed to hover over this evil place. The enemy beat a retreat, intact and still redoubtable. "Fortune is a strumpet," murmured Napoleon.

Well, at least here was Moscow.

Moscow, after Byzantium the most Byzantine of the cities of the imagination! Moscow with its ikons and madonnas, its thousands of millions of domes painted virgin white, its barbaric luxury, Oriental motley and autocracy, moustached Cossacks, swarming sable and sandalwood; a medley of cruelty and innocence and cannon powder in which lived the whitest girls in the world on the frontier of Yellowry, with hands like milk and hearts like cupolas; Moscow cooing from porcelain bells, redolent of bronze and purple, where the beards of the priests trail through every street and immaculate little lambs are pastured on the cedar roofs; where the water of the children is more lily-like than lilies and the old men wear long robes woven of

nostalgia and gold; Moscow where legend floats like a scarf over the navel of the isbas; Moscow the cradle and tomb of the Czars, where every eve is Christmas Eve and every day is Easter Day.

Moscow, gateway to Mongolia! Moscow, gateway to the green Indies!

Moscow. The *Grande Armée* marched through its streets in a silence like that of birds of prey, broken only by the curt click of spurs. A horse whinnied suddenly, and its whinny rose into the pale air with strange solemnity. Everything looked secret, ironical, and fatal. The houses were empty, the palaces wide open. In the darkness, on little domestic altars, greenish candles were burning. Only the ill and the dying were left in this dead city, and their livid faces gleamed behind the windows. The fountains would not run, because they had been disembowelled of their pipes. The sycamores and the white larches had been sawn through level with the ground in the city squares. Statues stood veiled in crêpe at every crossroads. The place stank of cinnabar, cadavre, and macabre. Canaries lay with their

throats cut in their deal-wood cages. A clipped dog crawled by on three legs, the stump of his tail still bleeding. Phosphorescent rats pattered from pavement to pavement. An old woman in petticoats wandered in a lane looking among the cobblestones for midsummer night herbs and stooping over in the line of march. She was mad.

Such a spectacle is a real mental poison. It gives one the creeps. It grips one by the joints, by the entrails. It literally gave Napoleon the colic. He rode on with his eyes half shut in the heavy, soporific light. To right and left the walls were scrawled with barbaric, sibylline, funereally ominous inscriptions in charcoal: "The All Highest is preparing his Cauldron"; "Holy Russia is on the stairs"; "Ogre! you smell of ice." There was something extremely explosive in this mixture of childishness and crazy fanaticism. Beneath a portico they saw a sort of ancient patriarch, chubby and barrel-bellied, seated in a marble stall with the Gospels in his hands. Murat rode over with a swagger and ran his sword against the Book. It fell and broke into a thou-

sand bits, whereat all this soldiery started back affrighted and decamped at a gallop, its tail between its legs.

Finally they reached the Kremlin. In the light of the russet sun all these golden cupolas, these golden arrows, these golden crosses, gleamed as green as a cat's eyes. A mob of marshals and colonels, most of them born in an inn or a stable, cantered into the ancient Palace of the Czars among the candelabras of porphyry, the ivory reliquaries, the purple thrones, the massive and baroque treasures of the Orient.

* * *

In the Kremlin Napoleon tasted perhaps the most ideal, the most childish, the most intrinsic joys of his whole life. He, who had never felt himself at ease in the midst of voluptuousness, radiated the pleasure of the senses here. He lived in a sort of celestial dream, crude and naïve as a church-window, radiant and radiating. He could not get his fill of contemplating this mystical Palace, of mirroring his soul in it. This, then, was his nostrum, his mother's cross, his seventh

heaven of delight. This Kremlin, scarred with tyranny, pomp, divinity, and swarming with gold, gems, and ikons which are idols, was the tangible image of the not distant India. Its cupolas brought to mind India's pagodas; and the intimate sign of Asia was in this marriage of profane treasures, precious stones, the oil of consecration, and the Gods. How good it was to dream with a crown of stone on one's head and in the sky!

"Fire! fire!" came the sudden cry out of red mouths, golden boots, sentinels, aides-de-camp. Fire? Napoleon stood up. What immemorial memories were wakened in him by the Promethean word? What ancestry of brush, jungle, and flood? There he stood in the ancient throne room battened by its high, prophetic, red draperies. He stood motionless while the vaguest, the most subtle, the craftiest, the most feline and the most Giocondian of smiles ran over his elliptical lips. Nobody dared stir; but what was he waiting for?

Meanwhile, couriers and marshals were rushing in through every door. Come, little Corsican! Leave your

Nirvana. (Ah, there is the word: Nirvana, the supreme milk and snare of Asia. In this ambiguous Moscow, even Napoleon let himself glide into Nirvana and was annihilated. Is such a man unconquerable in fair combat? Nature, in order to beat him, seems to have had to employ her most mysterious bait, to have had recourse to her most maleficent bird-charming. Fate donned the serpent's guise.) He trembled, went over to the window, and stood tapping the pane with his slender, Chinese hand.

From one instant to the next new fires glowed and zigzagged across the town. These fires began at the rush or deal-wood roofs where nuts and corn-husks and hemp lay drying and shepherds' crooks and pitchforks were strewn. A fuse hissed, a cluster of sparks arose, and then a flame shot chanting into the air. Behind closed doors the fire moved slowly, blindly, infallibly, from beam to beam and down the stairs, and then burst on all sides into the open. Thousands of millions of drops of water dripped out of the pockets of the flaming shells, while the tongues of flame licked

the walls and crackled and the floors fell in from room to room with a sharp ping! A window burst into flame, as square as a field. A tall chimney vomited a sky of stars. Napoleon gazed thoughtfully at the spectacle. He had sent away his aids and stood alone and mute at the window. Spangled with fire, his livid face was covered with an archaic green, was Pharaoh-green. What was he thinking? what was this grandiose brain thinking, invaded now by miasmas and shadows and flames? And what foe worthy of themselves was sought by those eyes in this apocalyptic panorama?

Like some great octopus, the conflagration spread as far as he could see. Eggs of fire spurted from the rickety houses; a thousand chicks of flame rose in the air. The smoke piled up in monstrous heaps over the naked city, a hairy, bestial smoke with the skin of a pachyderm and the hide of a hydra, glowing here and there with sulphurous gleams and ruddy poisons. Lying on its savage belly, Moscow shivered with incandescence. Cannon thundered uninterruptedly, for cannon were being used to fight the fire. Sirens and

trumpets filled all space with their shrieks. And Napoleon stood motionless in his favourite pose, a finger in his waistcoat. Suddenly the floods of smoke wavered and sank, and out of their entrails rose the purest, the most angelical, the most turtle-doveish flame in the world. Pigeon-throat, virgin-cheek, April-dawn was this flame, a paradise blooming with fire, a great organ's canticle. The highest of Moscow's domes flamed like the Graal. In this incredible clarity the tiniest details took on the sharpest relief. He could see soldiers running madly between the white-hot, green-hot walls. The finger-nails of one were on fire, and he waved his hand in the air like a five-branched candelabra. Another, his shako in flames, galloped about like a torch. The bursting of a cap button and the breaking of a phial resounded like thunder. Flaming rats ran along the water-spouts like so many holy ghosts. Sparrows took flight with their wings afire. This naturalo-mystical phenomenon was like the Midsummer Night bonfires of straw and pine-cones on the Latin countryside, but more coppery, more orgiastic,

more Levantine. This Slavic conflagration was a kind of celebration in which the mind looks instinctively for the wine-drunk ass and the harnessed swine which the Greeks assign to Bacchus.

The little Corsican God, his sword and uniform all purple, trembled and sighed. The fire seemed to titillate his nerves pleasantly. He strode back and forth in that great room into which the ashes had filtered and rained, his lips mumbling strange syllables. The servants hidden behind the doors heard his heavy footfalls, as dry and curt as a *sabot*, but none dared interrupt the solitary tragedy played on this night before Cæsar by vision and reality. He stopped; he was glowing like a woman in love. An inhuman intoxication scarred his dull skin. Heaven knows what delights gleamed and blossomed in his eyes. Was he enjoying the conflagration? Voluptuary! Voluptuary! Let us accuse him boldly of taking base pleasure from this destruction. His was the intoxication of Nero. There was a film of cynicism over those blissful features. A grain of sadism, like a grain of salt in the sea, lives in

every complete and superior happiness. Such souls are neutral on the field of Good and Evil (a field for boobies' games), and sit astride only the Great. He gazed at those flames which were of his race, and he admired them with a powerful and exquisite emotion which man tastes only twice or thrice in a life-time, but which is the ambrosia of life. Twice or thrice: on the night of the battle of Arcola, perhaps; on the morning of Acre, surely; and now again, at the sight of Moscow in flames. Where, you ask, are the violins? But what violin is as eloquent as silence? Our Nero detested masquerades. It was in the abyss of his soul that he savoured his carnival. Do you not see between the lines of his face that ideal hilarity? He laughs and laughs monstrously, seraphically,—one of those outbursts of laughter seen in the faces of slumbering children and on the faces of the dead.

CHAPTER VI

IT WAS A FINE EMPIRE

"I have been nothing but a wet hen."
—NAPOLEON.

VI

It Was a Fine Empire

"IT was a fine Empire" murmured Napoleon. He was sitting on the moss, and scattered here and there about him sat Las Cases, Montholon, and Gourgaud, listening like so many children. This took place out beyond the world, two thousand leagues from Europe, on a lost little island called St. Helena. As there was a Garden of Olives on the Hill of Calvary, so there was a Valley of Geraniums on the Island of St. Helena. It was a narrow, poetic valley at the bottom of which ran a cool stream over blue pebbles. Three weeping willows spread their melancholy foliage over the smiling landscape. An excessively blue dove cooed, or rather moaned, in the gum-trees. On the horizon lay the ocean. Napoleon liked to come here and sit musing in the shade of the willows. What a fairy-tale his life had

been! And what a film rapidly run off! "The seat of power was vacant, and I took it. . . ."

Lying flat in the grass on his stomach, Las Cases asked: "Where were you happiest?"

"I was happy when I was First Consul, when I married, and when the King of Rome was born. Perhaps I was happiest at Tilsitt, having those kings and emperors to pay me court. Perhaps I was really happiest in Italy. What shouts of enthusiasm! *Evviva! Evviva!* I saw the world spin beneath me as if I were being borne along on the air."

Suddenly, in a curt and cynical tone he said: "Bah! A living bounder is worth more than a dead emperor."

He took up his glass and turned it on the empty sea. Near by, the Bertrand children were shouting and frolicking. Everybody rolled and stretched in the brake, idling, playing, jollying. Fat Gourgaud gambolled about with Madame de Montholon, who laughed until she cried and kicked her legs in the air. The grooms lay on their backs and snored open-mouthed into the sky. Birdlings quarrelled (for love or cruelty?) on the

pebbly bank, and one of their tropical-pink feathers was wafted in the wind. Through the quiet air came the plaintive tone of the water, cascading among the rocks.

What was he seeing in the deserted immensity through his glass? "It was a fine Empire." Suddenly he folded his glass and turned his gaze from the ocean to the brook, smiling a curious, sardonic, bitter, superior smile. "All that time I was carrying the world on my shoulders," he murmured, "and that sort of thing grows a little tiring." His slender hand played with the moss and the willow-herbs. "The ring falls, but the finger remains." He looked dreamily at the brook, then he bent over and saw his image in it. Like a child he looked long at himself. There was something round and fatty, something strangely babyish about his face, something mothers call "chubby." What is there about certain round-faced men that reminds one of the curves and spheres of babyhood? His face was too full, its fat was too smooth, too oriental; it made one think of the copious thighs of odalisques. He

really had the face of a pasha. The three sketches drawn secretly by Girodet in the theatre of the palace of Saint-Cloud show him to have been astonishingly puffy.

There he was, mirroring his face in the sweet water and thinking of his fine empire. The tropical sun beat down unmercifully upon them. Under the willows a violet shade starred with leaves fell upon the ground. The sedge lay like a soft bed upon the volcanic soil. Blue flies flew in the subtle air, humming their hosannas. The coleopteræ on the feldspar lay in shameless and patient embrace. Here the cycle of things seemed more mineral than elsewhere; the gratification of the senses was here more motionless, more a conjunction with oblivion, than anywhere else. Napoleon felt happy, animally happy, which is to say ideally happy. The great Worker was wallowing in idleness for once.

He undid his tunic and yawned at the clouds. The dove, drunken with its own chant, came down to moisten its beak in the water. Like her, Napoleon

drank slowly out of his filled palm. "How good it is here," he sighed. "If I die on this island, I want to be buried on the bank of this stream."

* * *

In the Napoleonic drama St. Helena represents the Florentine scene, the Lombard climax. It is reminiscent of the poisons, the Leads. Once the great *condottiere* had been caught, there had to be found a torture worthy of him, worthy of his tyrant's breed. England, which had always been hand in glove with Verona, with Machiavelli, undertook the task. St. Helena was a disgustingly sinister place; to plant him there was screamingly funny; it was absolutely Shakespearean.

This background was of epical majesty, an island lost in immensity which their great dramatist would have liked,—barren plateau, basalt earth devoid of all vegetation save a few miserable gum trees. Great winds blew over it and bowed the trees ever in the same direction. The temperature was sharp and extreme, and the air was filled alternately with fog and burning heat. There was no firewood, and no potable

water save in this Valley of Geraniums, this unique oasis. The landscape was one of desolation and sterility well suited to the sting of Fate. And no man had ever reached the age of sixty on this island.

Despite all this, a little luck and a bit of tact might, in the beginning, have rendered the island endurable. There was a brief period in which life was not disagreeable. The novelty of the place and its savage solitude were not without their virtues. Well, Napoleon had said to himself, I'll live a planter's life here, and ride horseback in the woods. He even thought for an instant of abdicating his name. There is a certain pleasure in calling oneself Smith after having been Napoleon. But English gracelessness ruined everything. An English drillmaster, obedient to the letter of his regulations, invented—unbeknown to himself, poor chap!—a form of torture which had never come into the mind of the most exquisite executioner of China at her best: the torture of pride.

It began with shabbiness. Stripping away at their leisure, victories, coronation, and even time, the Eng-

lish chose to call the Emperor "General Bonaparte." Now, Napoleon was a man of antique simplicity; etiquette, titles, banners, and memories brought a smile to his lips. He left plume-waving to his field marshals, and was as happy in an old grey coat as Socrates with three olives. Still, he was not the man to allow an English lord to preach humility to him. Since they sought to deprive him of his imperial dignity, he insisted upon bearing it.

This detail of etiquette is the source of the drama which followed. For six years it constituted an insurmountable barrier between the Emperor and the Governor of the island. Little by little it irritated both parties to the point of turning that old woman, Hudson Lowe—who was probably a decent fellow at bottom—into a foul-smelling Cerberus, and Napoleon into a distinctly unmanageable prisoner. A situation as false as this could not but give rise to a thousand daily little conflicts, and here and there to occasional grave differences, some of them rather funny and others bitter

or curt. "I am not aware" wrote the Governor one day, "that there is an Emperor on this island."

As a fact, it was Hudson Lowe who was the butt of the farce. It goes without saying that he was the archtype of stage gaolers. Perched high on his fantastic legs, dry and knotty as a punch-and-judy skeleton, with a head like a pipe and one of those ruddy, scowling faces you see in the side-show at a fair, with bristling hair and stern eyebrows, awkward as a whale, he looked so much like a fusty character in a romantic play that he might have stepped straight out of the works of Victor Hugo. "He is hideous," Napoleon remarked upon first seeing him. "He looks like a Venetian *sbirro.*"

Napoleon was the cat and Hudson Lowe the mouse, and this cat had a bullet in his paw and malice in his blood. The feline, demoniacal side of Napoleon, and his extremely sardonic humour had full play in this encounter. He called Hudson Lowe, by Heaven knows what trick of the brain, the "Sicilian," and the poor Sicilian played the ridiculous rôle—struggling mean-

while for all he was worth—of the police officer among the puppets. Napoleon "pulled his leg" literally and figuratively, treating him in the way our hunters back home treat master gamekeepers. You know what we do. With gun in hand and slippered feet the hunter creeps along the hedge. Master gamekeeper opens an eye and raises an eyebrow. "There's a fellow who is up to no good," he growls. "I smell a poacher"; and off he goes at the hunter's heels. Our hunter, who knows what he is about, plays his part to the queen's taste. Pretending to be on the trail of his game, he runs as fast as he can across fields, jumps hedges, tumbles down hillsides, rushes about, and all the while master gamekeeper in his great boots, sweating like a pig under the raging sun, is after him. Finally, the hunter stops, raises his gun, fires, and brings down a plump and ruddy partridge. He has picked it up and is stroking it, his mouth watering the while, when the gamekeeper looms up.

"Where is your shooting licence?"

"Here it is," says the hunter mildly, with a smile a

league wide; and master gamekeeper's jaw drops and he goes off, swallowing his moustache.

From time to time, Napoleon would play that hunter. One day he dressed Abbé Vignali up in one of his imperial uniforms, lent him his horse and glass, and ordered him to ride swiftly, train the glass on the sea, and in every way simulate an expected rescue. The Abbé went off at a gallop, stopped on the top of a hillock, raised his glass, signalled in the direction of the sea, and then hid in the brush. Naturally, telegraphic messages were flashed by the guard, and the island was filled with alarms. Hudson Lowe and his staff rushed upon the pseudo-emperor, and damn me! it is only Vignali. "The Governor," records Antommarchi, "withdrew in confusion, declaiming in an angry rage."

It is to be expected that such pranks did not go far towards reconciling the adversaries. Trussed up, a fool's cap on his head, dressed in motley, Hudson Lowe avenged himself in the way that rascals and coarse-grained people always do—by practical means.

This pachyderm responded to the pinpricks of mind by kicking out his legs. Here we have the metaphysical side of the long duel on St. Helena between the apparatus of force and naked pride, the drill-sergeant and Ariel; this is what colours the captivity with legend and myth.

His first step towards cowing the Emperor was to padlock him. He had been parked in a rotting old stable built in the middle of the island on the high windy plateau. The stable had been patched up and named Longwood. Immediately, about Longwood, a wall was built. Sentinels were posted every fifty feet with fixed bayonets. But the enclosure still seemed to the Governor too large, therefore at night the cordon of sentinels was drawn tighter about the filthy cabin, since obviously the wall could not shrink. The man had to be isolated; he who had been the master of space had to be trussed up within the circumference of a penny. Gone were the idyllic strolls in the Valley of Geraniums, ended the horseback rides in the virgin brush. You roamed all over Europe on your horse, did

you? Well, Europe is two thousand leagues away. And no more letters to or from Europe; a wall of silence, as well as of stone. Complain, will you? We will give the screw another turn, deprive you of your companions and your staff. Las Cases has gone and Gourgaud is packing his trunk. Madame Bertrand and Madame de Montholon are mortally anxious to get away. Cirpriani is dead. Dr. O'Meara, Archambault, Rousseau, and Santini are expelled. You are alone, and alone you shall die.

Like Prometheus on his rock, though on a ridiculously tinier scale, Napoleon was chained within his enclosure. Beyond the wall all the island was on the watch. Two thousand two hundred ninety-one soldiers, four hundred ninety-three officers, and five hundred cannon stood guard. A thousand glasses were trained uninterruptedly on Longwood, piercing its windows. Even behind closed doors, the Emperor could not lift a finger without England knowing it. A signalling system prevailed: white flag—Napoleon is asleep; yellow flag—Napoleon is strolling; blue flag—Napoleon has

vanished. What did they do when . . . ? But no matter.

Thus on a solitary rock a morose Englishman was plagiarizing coarsely the tortures of the Inquisition. But in vain, in vain did he rack his stupid brain; pride, like the Phœnix, was reborn from its own ashes.

Let me stress these paltry things; tears, too, are small. I know nothing more moving in this most realistic of men than his vain and ungrateful maintenance of his dignity. He anchored himself to his title of Emperor, incorporated himself in it body and soul. Bit by bit the man disappeared in the emperor.

Not without occasional amusement, since humble humanity has chosen to laugh at Don Quixote. In this cabin called Longwood he established the very etiquette of the Tuileries: Grand Marshal, Chamberlain, Master of the Robe, silver service—all that was present. His celebrated carriage drives are a masterpiece of pride, innocence, and humour.

His ancient carriage, the only one on the island, had been bought at the Cape from some faded, sentimental

half-breed woman. The Archambauld brothers would harness to it six comical chocolate-coloured, little Javanese horses, as tiny and paunchy as you can imagine. The Emperor would get in, and round and round they would run in the tiny park surrounded by guns. They would turn about the small open square in great style, like a cavalcade in a circus ring, the ceremoniousness and the display of the turnout making up for the parsimony of the course. There were outriders, footmen, and little Hortense Bertrand riding side-saddle beside the carriage-door, dressed in a habit of gold and silk embroidered cerise velvet, the remains of a frock coat presented by the City of Lyons to the First Consul in 1800. Nothing was ever more nobly ridiculous, nothing more burlesquely ideal than this prisoner playing thus at Emperor. Red sentinels stand guard on the walls about the enclosure, all the glasses of the island are trained upon him, and he, impassive and serene, as grave as a Pope, turns and turns about. Thus does the solitary wild beast turn and turn about in its cage while pink and blue children laugh and toss bread-crumbs or

cock a snoot in the direction of the powerful and mysterious eye that flames behind the bars.

This claustration of the body, this permanent contraction of the soul, ended by altering and destroying the Emperor's health. He was fifty years old, a critical period in a man's life. His father had died at thirty-five leaving him the germ of cancer. In 1819 he had complained of stomach trouble. In 1820 symptoms appeared and developed in a serious degree. The slightest effort fatigued him; the air was bad for him; his legs began to swell. Little by little he gave up all exercise, stopped his daily walks, his riding, even his driving. As birds do when they die, he hid when he suffered. He surrendered to the quicksand of illness. He spent his days stretched out on a sofa in his rooms, doors and windows hermetically closed. He dressed in vaguely Turkish fashion—"a white dressing-gown, wide white trowsers, red slippers, and a madras cloth wound about his head." He would lie and chat. One day he said to Antommarchi:

"Do you know the battles of Alexander?"

"No, Sire."

"Cæsar's?"

"No, Sire."

"You know mine, at least."

"No, Sire. Thus far my business has been with corpses."

"Ah, poor company!"

There were times when a wind of gaiety would blow through his pores, an almost disquieting kind of mischievousness. Hear.

"He was in his shirt," Antommarchi reports, "bareheaded, with two men servants, one on either side. One held a looking-glass and a towel, and the other the rest of the toilet articles. The Emperor lathered his face and shaved with rare dexterity. Then he passed his hand over his chin. 'Up with the mirror! Did I do well? Not one hair got away. What do you say, scamp?' Meanwhile he tapped and smacked them both, laughed, made them laugh, and drove them about in the jolliest fashion in the world. Then he washed his mouth with a mixture of brandy and plain water, of

which he swallowed part. I asked him why he did that. 'Because,' said he, 'what is good for the gums cannot be bad for the stomach.' "

Meanwhile Hudson Lowe was restless; he was not seeing "his" Bonaparte. It goes without saying that he did not believe a word of the illness. That was a joke to him. And when Dr. Antommarchi insisted, he replied: "Ill? Don't you believe it. General Bonaparte is in excellent health. As for the island, it has the most salubrious climate of any I know."

One day he rode fretfully to Longwood. Seeing him from afar the Bertrand children cried out: "The Sicilian! The Sicilian!" and they rushed to inform the Emperor who lay prostrated in an armchair. He rose up on his wavering legs and his black eyes flashed as he exclaimed, "What? He dares come here!" Hudson Lowe rode up and dismounted. The house was barricaded. He made the round of the place swearing and raging. Finally he met Dr. Antommarchi and said to him curtly, "What is General Bonaparte doing?"

"I don't know," said Antommarchi.

"Where is he?"

"I don't know."

"Is he not here?"

"He is not here."

"Vanished?"

"Entirely."

Then Antommarchi added gently: "Only the Emperor Napoleon is here."

Hudson Lowe marched furiously to the door and pounded and shouted. From within he heard a feeble voice murmur: "If he comes in, he will die. Hand me my pistols."

Prudently, master Hudson Lowe decamped.

The days passed, two thousand days. Napoleon grew feebler and thinner. His flesh lost its imperial richness, his features lost their fat, and little by little he was metamorphosed once more into the angular First Consul, into the biting and pathetic sub-lieutenant. He spoke now only of his youth, Italy, and Egypt. "We were young then, and gay, noisy, as Republican as Brutus." He lingered affectionately over Mediterranean

food. "A good *étouffé* made by a Genoese, or a *pilau* in the Milanese style, or *taillerons* as they are cooked in Corsica, are worth more to me than all the marvels of the kitchen." He acquired a taste for wine, for a little wine from Constance; "It's good; it's very good," he would say, clacking his tongue.

* * *

Thus he dragged out his existence through the first violets of the spring of 1821 when the stars, in which he had always had faith, made their sign to him. On the second of April a comet appeared in the East, the land of the Magi. Napoleon's face glowed. "Ah!" he said, "my death will be marked like that of Cæsar."

The next day: "Come, let us make our will," and he set to work. Seated in bed with a sort of paper box by way of desk on his knees, he began to write. His face, smeared with beard, gave off a black radiance. His features were cramped and wrinkled. His nose advanced like a spur, like a prow, over the universe. Standing beside his bed the Count de Montholon held the ink-pot as if it were the Holy Sacrament.

"Ill of body but sound in mind . . .

"I desire that my ashes be laid to rest on the banks of the Seine in the midst of my beloved French people.

"I bequeath . . ."

He stopped, his hand in the air. His glance roamed over the deluge of spoils in the shabby drawing-room. Once again and with burning eye he savoured the symbolic treasures heaped up about him. Relics of glory necessarily smell of the jungle. A thin smile fled over his ghost-like face, and his nostrils quivered. . . . I bequeath . . . And his hand fell as an eagle falls. . . .

"I bequeath my sword, the sword I carried at Austerlitz . . ."

A cough stopped Austerlitz. He grew pale beyond all pallor, tragically motionless, on the edge of who knows what eternity. His pulse was feeble. Slowly two drops of blood came into his cheeks. His eyes shone again. "I bequeath . . .

". . . to my son, the Sabre of Sobieski, the Sword of Consulship, the silver-gilt sword, the iron sword . . ."

"I bequeath, I bequeath . . .

". . . my alarum-clock, which had belonged to Frederick and which I took at Potsdam.

". . . the ancient cameo given me at Tolentino by Pius VI . . .

". . . my gold-fitted toilet case, which I used mornings at Ulm, Jena, Friedland, and Montmirail. . . ."

The pale lips breathed forth these most illustrious syllables in the world, and the mind grew drunken with the thought of their sonorous meaning. One after the other, the objects he mentioned were heaped up by Marchand on the floor at his feet and gleamed in the penumbra. Little by little there was piled before him a dramatic mound; a whole life was sacked. Ah, how he loved booty, this great little Corsican! how he loved to rifle Europe of its lands and thrones, of everything brilliant, everything proud and honourable! And now, from his death bed, he surveyed his trophies. He seemed to be drawing his spoils behind his hearse as the Roman emperors drew their slaves behind their triumphal chariots. What fervour, what gratification of the senses, in this inventory of crowns and imperial

purple! Do you hear the Golden March? "My medals, my silverware, my Sèvres porcelain. My three saddles, my spurs. My spyglass. My hunting knife." And with these, "A Henri IV hat and a toque. Two embroidered mantles of crimson velvet with vests and breeches. The silver-gilt candlestick, and the silver night-lamp." Attila is preparing his burial. "The Collar of the Golden Fleece, a velvet sash, a sable coat." Ah, it was a fine Empire! Suddenly, in a loud, delirious voice: ". . . a blue cloak, the one I wore at Marengo."

Marengo! The name sent his blood rushing. He saw again the wide and endless plain of Lombardy in the sinking sun, and Desaix riding up. A sort of tumult rose to his lips, and the stammered words fluttered like rags: "Forward! Run! Steingel, Desaix, Masséna! Charge them! They are ours!" But in the midst of his charge he weakened. The powerful head fell back upon the pillow and blanched as white as plaster.

A frightful cramp seized him, and he saw thirty-six thousand burning candles. He rolled on his couch, coughing and gasping and throwing up yellow bile

and tri-coloured vomit which flowed over the ink and wreathed the bed. In his own jargon the doctor wrote: "Rigid eyelids; agitation of the abdominal muscles; cloudy and sedimentary urine." At last he opened an eye, and as a window at morning is gradually filled with a green landscape, so his eye slowly filled with colour. "I bequeath . . . Marchand, my snuff-boxes."

Marchand took up a mahogany chest and opened it on the bed. Thirty-two snuff-boxes came tumbling out, some rolling on the bed like mice and others falling off on the floor with strange tinklings. The Emperor clutched them in both hands against his breast, like a motherly hen. His chest gleamed and glittered with gold, ivory, cedar, and enamel, while the boxes tinkled and all but peeped, so that the death bed seemed for a moment to be a cradle. He fondled and stroked and smelled them one by one with a beatific smile. Here was a box from Moscow, smelling of human leather and glowing with the reflection of the fire still upon its flanks. This, with its elephantine curves, was given him by the Pasha of Damascus, on the road to India. Ah,

here was Malatesta's snuff-box, sneaked at Venice. This one, given him by the King of Spain, was made in Peru of rosewood and bears the arms of the sun. Another, decorated with a cluster of grapes, he took from Louis XVIII's table at the Tuileries on the 20th of March. There were Viennese snuff-boxes, bellied like arch-duchesses; Turkish boxes inscribed with verses of the Koran in Arabic; Cyprian snuff-boxes redolent of wine, and boxes from Warsaw smelling of women. "Let us talk about women. I never had time for them. If I had had . . ." And here was one made of wild-cherry wood, the shabbiest and least graceful of the lot. "Ah, grandfather's snuff-box, from Ajaccio." Thus he went on, plunged in a haze of enchantment while his skinny, child-like hands stirred about the heap of toys. Sweat poured down from him upon his playthings. As in a dream, he began to play hide-and-seek with his thirty-three snuff-boxes, slowly, slowly, until they were strewn over his pillow and rolling down his neck. The dying man playing his childish game was an hallucinating, a ghastly sight that made

one's flesh creep. He tired, and dropped wearily off to sleep. He slumbered in a heaven of snuff-boxes, with baubles of sound and labial trinkets on his lips, and in his face, something like pristine innocence. He was babbling to the angels, I am sure. Motionless, Montholon and Marchand waited, their hands filled with little clocks and water crocks, themselves standing up to the knees in a junk heap of candlesticks and clothes and saddles and sabres. The silence buzzed with a sound of bees. From beyond the earth the voice of a mother cradling her child seemed to come into the room:

Sleep, little man,
Mother is with the stars,
Father is with the birds,
    Sleep, sleep.
Sleep, sleep, little scamp,
God is pulling out his watch,
The stars are pooping gold abroad,
    Sleep, sleep.

When Napoleon awoke, he seemed to be back from a journey. His face spoke of the Far East. He had the

look of a rajah as he gazed at the treasure of snuff-boxes strewn about his ears. I bequeath . . . To whom shall he bequeath these boxes?

". . . to my son!"

". . . Linen—six shirts, six handkerchiefs, six pairs of stockings, six sleeping trowsers, one pair of braces, six madras shirts, four pairs of drawers." Ah, it was a fine Empire! . . . Who is to get this saintly garb? "To my son!"

Out of a chest Marchand drew a cloud of Alençon and Malines lace. I bequeath . . . "My lace to the Empress Marie Louise."

Of a sudden he burst into laughter, that sardonic laughter which was perhaps the most profound and mysterious stigma on his soul; that laughter in which historians see mischievousness and which was perhaps Mephistophelian. I bequeath . . . "A small pair of stocking supporters to Prince Lucien. . . . My silver-gilt *bidet* to the Cardinal."

He stopped, strangely hilarious, his pen in his beak like a school boy worried over his lesson, hunting in

the four corners of his memory. What else? Oh, Hortense's collar!

Marchand brought it forward. It was a collar of glowing pearls which Hortense had stuffed into his pocket like an anxious mother, as a sort of supreme viaticum, on the day he left Malmaison. He took it for a moment into his translucent hands, examined the orient of the pearls and the sort of carnal phantasy that is in them—for pearls are, as women are, the daughters of Bohemia. Then, holding it out to Marchand, he said: "Here, I give this to you." And then, seized by some fear or other, he added: "But hide it; hide it well on your person." Marchand had to strip off his clothes on the spot and string the full-blown pearls over his hairy chest. "Farther down" the Emperor whispered, and the worthy valet wound the collar about his waist, looking very comical indeed, but heedless of that, since simple souls have a sense of the incomprehensible.

And now what? In these last moments of his life he felt a certain excitement over his bequests; he would

have given away Golconda, the moon. Swiftly, he bequeathed his private property, worth two hundred millions; the treasures of the patriarchate of Venice; the jewels hidden at Malmaison; the malachite furniture brought back from Moscow; his farms on the island of Elba; a mercury deposit in Italy; Mt. Napoleon, near Milan; and after bequeathing matter, he bequeathed symbols with an Oriental expansiveness which rose to his lips with his mother's milk. I bequeath . . . "Fifty thousand francs to General Camboronne." I bequeath . . . What? "My hair. Marchand will preserve my hair, and have made of it a bracelet for the Empress Marie Louise, another for my mother, and a thicker bracelet for my son."

Thus he beat the call of his heart, almost to the point of ripping out his own entrails, like a pelican, in order to bequeath them, too. He burrowed into his life (through a spyglass, of course), and across a sea of glory he saw the shores of Corsica. The shadow of death seems always to send a man back into his cradle. His mind, like a ship, sank into his childhood. We

speak in French of "falling back into childhood," and the expression is precisely and terribly true; it brings to mind an image of the upward climb which is life, and the final drop to the foot of the wall. Back whence we started. His mother tongue flowed suddenly over the dying man's lips. He began to hum a little Italian air, and it was sinister. "Ah, *dottoraccio,* where is the beautiful sky of Corsica? Corsica! I can see its heights, its mountains. I feel myself walking over its earth. I recognize it by the odour it gives forth." His eyes gleamed strangely. He "saw" a little square in Ajaccio with its four hollow elms where the wild bees had their hives and were smoked out by the children, with great cries, in September. He saw himself playing hop-scotch on this little square, broiled and re-broiled by the sun, with its trellises and its blossoms. He saw a lank-haired *bambino* with a sallow skin, already sharp and proud, but awkward, timid, gawky and ill dressed, made fun of by everybody for his strangeness and his corkscrew stockings. "*Napoleone, di mezza calzetta, fa l'amore a Giacominetta.*" He heard the nickname

shouted aloud: "*Napioglione*"—"*Straw-in-the-Nose.*" And he saw himself chalking mathematical problems on the pavement, dreaming already of Indian rajahs, chasing rainbows. Little by little the universe grew localized, became centred in a pair of glasses. And in the immensity of space he saw now only two figures: his mother, and his son; the beginning and the end of man's existence, the trunk and the flower. . . .

And then in one bequest, in one supreme catalysis, he fused the two figures for ever. I bequeath . . . "To my son, the house in which I was born."

Fate, in its turn, bequeathed him tranquillity. A kind of smile lingered thereafter on his face, and its features grew more and more child-like. The Dantesque profile of the sub-lieutenant gave way to the phiz of a wild youngster. He awoke, mischievous and sardonic.

"Well, my son," he said to Montholon. "Would it not be a shame not to die after such a splendid will?"

And after a moment—"Here I am without a groat."

A number of days went by this way in slumber and spoofing, while he day-dreamed on and on. "I shall

meet my fine fellows again in the Elysian Fields—Kléber, Desiax, Bessières, Duroc, Ney, Masséna, Berthier; they will all come to meet me. When they see me they will be mad with enthusiasm and glory. Murat, with his plumes dangling to the ground, will kiss my cheek beneath the whinnying laurels. There will be great fountains in the prairies of Paradise, and the paladins of all time will gather and shine like a rainbow. Cæsar will be there, standing as bald as a blue firmament in the shadow of an oak with poppies growing in his murdered breast. Come, my children, take my arm, and let us stroll imperially through the Fields. Here is Alexander, the Raphael of Battle, looking like a youth and dancing white-heeled on Persian roses. Here is Frederick II with his three-cornered hat under his arm, meditating alone under a great dappled sky. The heroes of Homer move about in the shade of the myrtles and the acacias. Hannibal on a green elephant sways slowly along the bank of the Styx. At last, a court worthy of Napoleon! I shall tell them of my battles, of Arcola, Austerlitz and its frozen pool;

their jaws will drop with amazement and we shall laugh and laugh. . . ."

On the fourth of May one of those fierce, sudden tropical hurricanes came thundering down upon St. Helena, uprooting trees, ripping away roofs, and roaring in the chimneys. The genii of the world seemed to wish to effect some strange communion between the frightful abyss of this body and the uprising of the winds. The rolling drums of the tempest seemed to come from beyond the grave to the ears of the dying man. He gasped, his breath came short; large drops of sweat poured heavily from him. Nothing is sadder that the simple medical terms of the doctor's diagnosis. "Continued gasping. Sardonic laughter. Eyes glazed. Spasms of the epigastrium and the stomach. Hippocratic face." A sinister, grandly mysterious litany. Clouds of sand blew up and whipped the panes. Did Napoleon imagine that he saw in them the face of Hudson Lowe? He sat up suddenly, turned towards the window, and said to Bertrand in a passionate voice: "Write! Write that this is a series of outrages. Put in everything; don't

leave out a word. I came to sit down beside the hearth of the British people, and I was received with irons. You have murdered me slowly, little by little, with premeditation, assassinated me with pinpricks. You will kill me in the end, and I, dying on this rock of horror, deprived of my people and lacking all succour, I bequeath to England the horror and the opprobrium of my death."

This was his final bequest. In utter exhaustion, he fell back upon his couch in a deluge of sweat, saliva, and glair.

The next morning, the fifth of May, he spent long hours plunged in a sort of lethargy. "Body frozen, tetanic spasm, lockjaw. Pulse barely palpable in the carotids." From the Grand Marshal to the lowest scullion the Emperor's household were all present, standing as mute as swans about his bed, each eager to see with his own eyes how Napoleon died, in order to be able to transmit the story to the children of his children. Noverraz, who was ill, had dragged his trembling body to the scene. The three Bertrand children came

in on tiptoe. They stared open-mouthed at the lugubrious bed and the household which stood stiffly at attention. "Eyes glazed; deep sighs; sad cries; loud, sinister sobbing." The smallest child, Napoleon Bertrand, feeling confusedly that some inconceivable crime had been committed, some incredible punishment was being meted out, asked suddenly in the silence: "Mamma, what has he done?" Napoleon heard him, and jerked himself up on his pillows. "What have I done?" (and one felt that this was the last gasp of his soul, the supreme evacuation of his ideas, a sort of deliverance of the very marrow of his bones to the sun of eternity). "What have I done? The great port of Antwerp and that of Flushing, able to berth the greatest squadrons. The hydraulic works of Dunkerque, le Havre, Nice. The gigantic port of Cherbourg. The maritime works of Venice. The beautiful highways from Antwerp to Amsterdam, Mayence to Metz, Bordeaux to Bayonne. The roads over the Simplon, over Mt. Cenis, Mt. Genèvre, the Corniche Road, opening the Alps in every direction and surpassing in audacity,

grandeur, and artistry all the works of the Romans. The roads from the Pyrenees to the Alps, from Parma to Spezzia, from Savona to Piedmont. The bridges of Jena, Austerlitz, the Arts; of Sèvres, of Tours, of Roanne, of Lyons, of Turin, of the Isère, of the Durance, of Bordeaux, Rouen, and how many others. The canal joining the Rhine to the Rhône. The reclamation of the marshes of Bourgoin, Cotentin, and Rochefort. The Civil Code, the Napoleon Museum. The re-building of most of the churches demolished during the Revolution, and the construction of new ones. The completion of the Louvre. The public granaries. The Bank of France. The Ourcq Canal. The water system of Paris. The numerous sewers, quays, monuments and embellishments of that great capital. Four hundred beet-sugar factories. Sixty millions in furnishings. Sixty millions in crown diamonds, all bought with Napoleon's private funds. There is a treasure that will live through the ages. There are the monuments which will confound calumny. What have

I done? I have cleansed the Revolution. I have brought order out of chaos."

Then, falling back for the last time upon his couch, he sighed, "What a novel my life has been!"

* * *

Hudson Lowe was apprised, and came. He shook his head solemnly over the loss. "What a pity," he said. "We were about to free him. Well, he is dead, and this is the end. We shall give him a splendid funeral."

* * *

The great *condottiere* seems to have wished to take with him into the grave and beyond the grave the insignia and certain specimens of his terrestrial booty. With him into his coffin went a uniform of the Guard, including white silk stockings, riding boots, white cashmere vest and breeches, a hat with the tri-colour cockade, and a green coat embroidered in red. The bier was filled with spolia and trophies. "A silver vase with the imperial arms," says Frédéric Masson, "a silver knife, fork, and spoon; a silver dish; six double napoleons of French gold, four simple napoleons; one

double napoleon of silver, one simple napoleon, one half-napoleon; and two double napoleons of Italian gold." Over this sinister trousseau, this ingenuous and magnificent obol, was spread the cloak he wore at Marengo. Had he been Attila, his storehouses, his treasures, and his horses would have been immolated on his sepulchre; and had he been an Indian Rajah, wives would have been burned with the treasures. . . .

One bright morning the funeral procession took its way to the Valley of Geraniums. The month of May was imperial. Abbé Vignali, in his sacerdotal vestments, intoned the *Dies irae* under a leaden sun. Little Henri Bertrand, holy-water brush in hand, served as acolyte. Behind, walked the Emperor's Household, Ali, the Emperor's horse, and Hudson Lowe with his staff. They moved without particular order around the flank of the hill, some afoot, others on horseback, over the pebbles, the broom, and the pine-stumps, slipping, knocking into one another, sweating heavily. The hearse, jolted its way strangely along the edge of the

ravine. They reached the place of burial. The brook was running as before through the blue moss. The turtle-dove in the willow moaned and moaned. . . .